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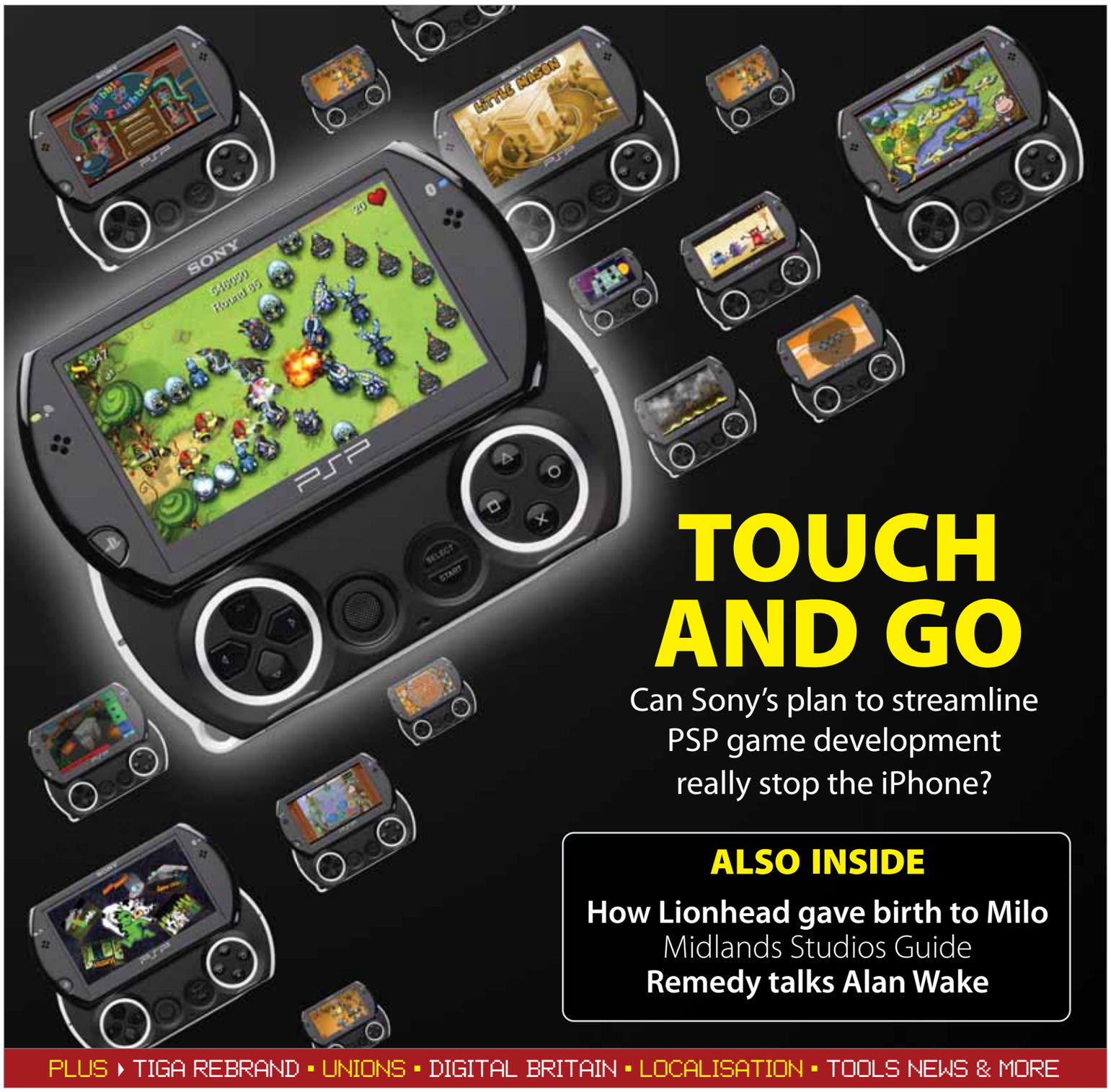

TOUCH AND GO

Can Sony's plan to streamline PSP game development really stop the iPhone?

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How Lionhead gave birth to Milo
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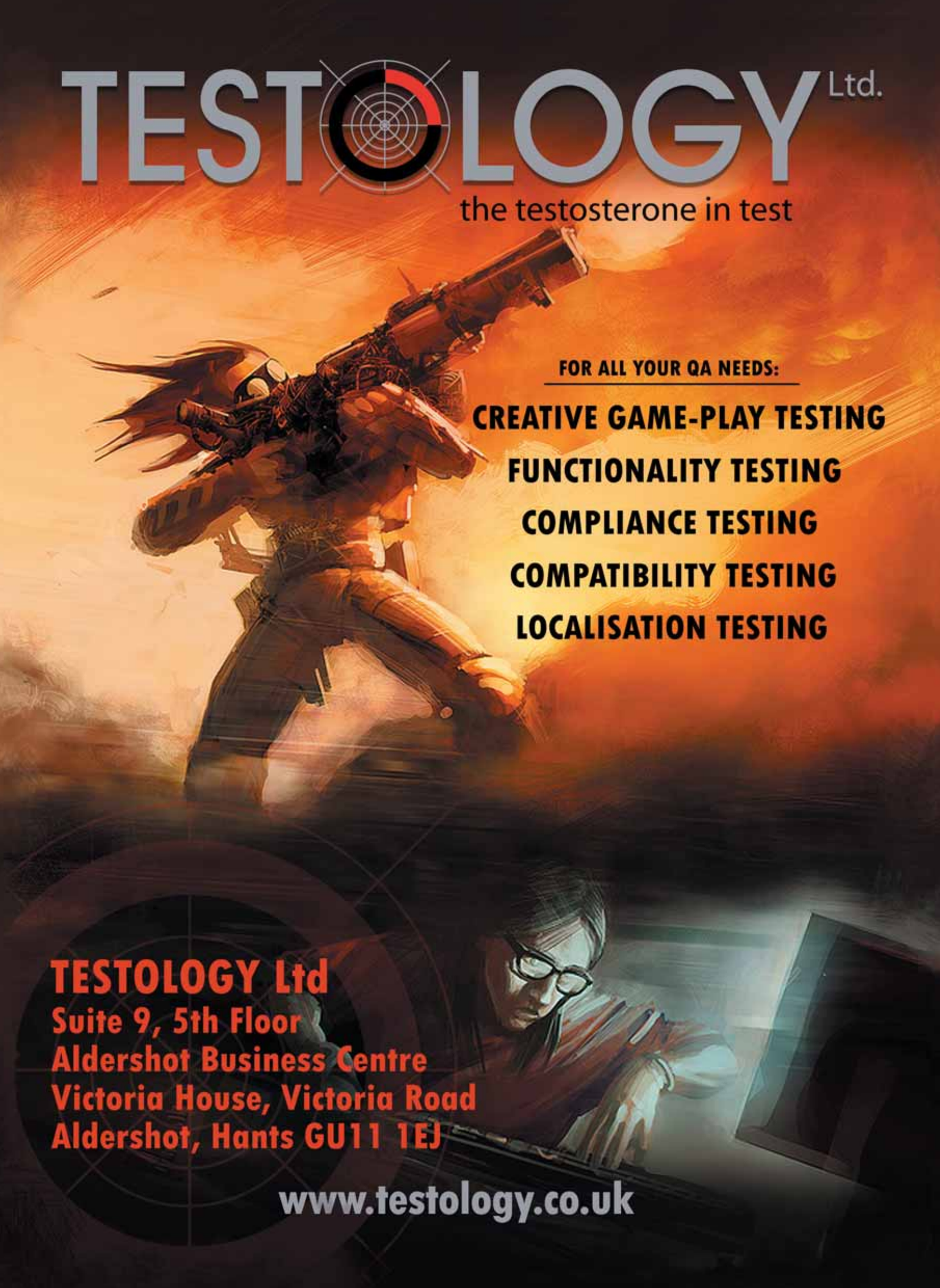
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ALPHA

ADVENTURES IN GAMES DEVELOPMENT: NEWS, VIEWS & MORE

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Body says developers must unionise
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Tiga roars at Government

UK developer association rebrands and unveils NESTA partnership ● Aims to 'make UK best place to do games business'

by Ed Fear

Tiga's Richard Wilson unveiled the new brand for the organisation plus the collaboration with NESTA at a special event in Westminster

A new brand, new partnerships, and new initiatives: Tiga is changing.

In an attempt to show that it's not a one-trick tax-break-lobbying pony, Tiga has teamed with NESTA – the Lottery-funded National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts – to launch Play Together, a range of initiatives to help UK studios be more competitive.

The chief push is Industry Sharing, a new service for sharing employees between studios. The idea is to ease the pressure of finding work for large teams in-between projects.

As a concept, it's something *Develop* has covered before – but there are many developers cautious or just outright sceptical about it. Jon Kingsbury, programme director for the creative economies at NESTA, said he understands the reticence.

"If people say that the idea's great, but they're not sure how it'll pan out, then they're exactly right," he told *Develop*.

"It all comes down to the execution. There really will be iteration on this, I'm sure – even today I'm collecting ideas from people about the things they'd like it to cover. No one has ever done this before."

Other initiatives include Creative Industry Switch, aimed to help companies in different media sectors collaborate easier; plus a new website that will feature sections allowing UK developers and suppliers to promote their capabilities online, an education section to help studios and Universities collaborate, plus a jobs board.

The real validation of Tiga's new image won't come from the results of these initiatives, though, but more in converting old lapsed members. After what many suggest was a difficult year financially for the group as memberships fell – not to mention the transition to a new CEO – Tiga has needed to convince many that their outlay is worthwhile. And attitude in the room seemed to point in that direction: several developers told *Develop* that they viewed it as a step in the right direction, and were considering re-joining the organisation.

> ***"These initiatives are going to make us much more visible to the State."***
> Richard Wilson, Tiga

If anyone felt that Tiga was a group that was all talk no action, the headway it's made into Government in the past year alone – including helping create and providing secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the games industry and the backing it's secured from MPs based on the NESTA initiatives – is proof that its efforts don't begin and end with press releases.

And the NESTA collaboration – which Wilson describes describes as 'a real boon for us' – will also help strengthen the case for tax breaks. "NESTA is really well regarded within Government," he said. "So these initiatives, and NESTA's support and resources in implementing them, are going to make us much more visible to Government."

One of the real surprises about Tiga's aggressive new brand, however, is its new strap line: 'Representing the Games Industry'. Coupled with the organisation's new official motto – 'making the UK the best place to do games business' – we couldn't leave without asking: does WIlson think this new boistrous image and slogan might ruffle features at a certain other trade organisation?

"Only if they're paranoid," he replied. With more Government links and forward momentum than ever, they just might be.

Editorial

New Port' of call

HAVING THE PS3 boot-up noise as the sound of an orchestra warming up was always a risky choice for Sony.

It's too easy for us journalists to abuse; there's loads of jokes you can make about discord, a lack of corporate harmony, or an out of tune strategy.

And certainly, through the dwindle of PSP and struggle of PS3, and the questions made by developers over things like price and piracy, the situation seemed less than harmonious for Sony.

But the format-holder's new strategy for more actively pursuing digital content for PSPgo looks like it could stem that. In fact, it's not pursuing it; it's changing approval and licensing processes and rebuilding the pipeline to ensure that new and more non-traditional games and studios can get on board; to attract their support, rather than capture them.

In the age of the iPhone, it's a relief to see the firm specifically address where its weaknesses lie. Sure, when it comes to public, on the record statements, its executives say that there is no major new initiative; that it isn't troubled by Apple and that this is a gradual change. But you can bet there were some frantic conversations behin closed doors when it was clear Apple had 40m units of its handheld in just two years. It took Sony twice that long to sell 50m.

This case of 'if you dismantle it they will come' is a real change from Sony's previous brute force approach to being a platform-holder. It will be interesting to see how well the new initiative works.

A SIMILAR ACKNOWLEDGMENT to the wider world of games development can be found at the Develop Conference and Develop Awards, which take place in just a matter of days.

From the Evolve conference, which features speakers from across the spectrum of online, digital distribution, mobile and casual, through to the 70-odd different firms shortlisted for the Awards, the event is proof positive how games development has become vastly different just a matter of years. You'd be nuts to miss the big show planned for Brighton, so if you haven't already, book your space, grab your bucket and spade, and come join us.

Michael French
michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

Developers must

UK entertainment union responds to Develop's Global Quality of Life

by Ed Fear

UK media and entertainment union BECTU has said that it could tackle the 'excessive hours of work culture' in the games industry if more developers were to join.

Responding to *Develop*'s Global Quality of Life Survey, the results of which were published in issue 94, BECTU's Arts & Entertainment Division supervisor Willy Donaghy called our findings, which found that 98 per cent of game developers do not receive paid ovetime, were in line with the organisation's investigations.

But he warned that employers need to be reminded that they have an 'overriding duty of care to staff': "I doubt that many employers – if any at all – have undertaken a risk assessment on the hours of work of their staff.

> ***"There's no history of union in the games industry to which workers can identify with."***
>
> *Willy Donaghy, BECTU*

"It's interesting that there is a relatively high level of pension and private health care provision, although a cynic would say that the health care provision is needed because the excessive hours of work will inevitably lead to illness."

Many workers within the development industry are unaware that there is even a trade union that covers them, and more still wonder how game developers fit into an organisation more traditionally focused on stage and screen.

Donaghy admits that the union doesn't have many game developer members – "There's no history of trade

unionise, says BECTU

Survey by issuing call to arms encouraging workforce to fight for its rights

The Writer's Guild of America famously went on strike last year over low pay – could developers do the same when it comes to overtime? BECTU, responding to data published by Develop, says studios would benefit from unionising

union organisation in the games industry to which workers can refer to and identify with, which is a difficulty," he said. But he is keen to point out that much can be done for those thinking of joining.

"BECTU is proud of its achievements over the years, and I'm confident that we could address the excessive hours of work culture in the games industry and the problems that this brings to workplaces and home life. However, it is BECTU policy that the members identify the issues that they want addressed rather than 'the union' telling them the issues to be addressed – whether that is to do with pay and conditions, health and safety, or training."

www.bectu.org.uk

Misconceptions?

One of the common arguments used against the unionisation is that applying a rigid structure to a process as 'organic' as game development will restrict the creativity of workers, resulting in worse products.

We put this to BECTU's Arts & Entertainment Division supervisor Willy Donaghy, and he pointed out that the union's experience in other sectors proves that wouldn't be the case.

"BECTU traditionally organises within theatre and live events, film and television: these are UK sectors that are recognised and applauded around the world for creativity and innovation.

"Our record speaks for itself in these industries, and union recognition has helped rather than hindered this creativity and innovation."

Another retort often cited by studio heads is that making overtime official just incentivises staff to not work as hard during the day.

"Our experience is the opposite," said Donaghy when presented with this.

"Rules on overtime tend to encourage productivity rather than create a barrier. Workers do not want to work over their basic wage to get a decent rate of pay."

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New look for Develop Online

Leading site for games developers gets new look and a new URL at www.develop-online.net

Develop's online presence was given an exciting new look earlier this month.

The site has a new URL too: www.develop-online.net

The sleek upgrade reinforces the site's position as the leading news source for the global games development community, featuring breaking stories, industry comment, interviews with leading names, company spotlights and in-depth profiles.

Our new website also brings with it a number of new features, including a customisable news feed page, an improved comment system, and a blog written by both *Develop's* on-staff writers and our many industry contributors.

News content is also grouped into categories specific for each major games development territory and subject, so readers can find news relevant to their region or interest.

Develop Online also includes a directory of leading games development companies, and digital downloads of our previous print editions.

The site also boasts a new look for its email alerts - these keep you abreast of all the latest news either as a Daily Digest, which includes a summary of the day's news, or a Newsflash for breaking news.

Develop's online editor Rob Crossley, the former UK online editor for Edge, is the main point of contact for the new site. He can be reached through email on **Rob.Crossley@intentmedia.co.uk** or via telephone at the Intent Media offices on 01992 535 646.

The *Develop* site also offers an increased number of advertising and sponsorship opportunities. Get in touch by sending an email to **Katie.Rawlings@intentmedia.co.uk** for more details.

www.develop-online.net

DEVELOP DIARY

YOUR COMPLETE GAMES DEVELOPMENT EVENT CALENDAR FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD...

09
Part of the Edinburgh Festival
EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE
Expanding the Creative Culture of Games
13th - 14th August 2009

EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE
August 13th to 14th
Edinburgh, Scotland
edinburghinteractivefestival.com

The ever-popular Edinburgh Interactive Festival returns for its seventh anniversary.

Designed to showcase the continued popularity, growth and influence of video games, the week-long event promises to explore the culural impact of the medium, and look to the future of interactive entertainment forms.

As well as a public element, the Scottish festival's industry conference will deliver keynotes, panel sessions and presentations, as well as chances to share knowledge and gain insights into technological innovations and future trends. The industry conference will also address issues in related industries such as film and TV.

JULY 2009

DEVELOP CONFERENCE 2009
July 14th to 16th
Brighton, UK
www.develop-conference.com

DEVELOP INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
July 15th
Brighton, UK
www.developmag.com/develop-awards

CASUAL CONNECT SEATTLE
July 21st to 23rd
Seattle, US
seattle.casualconnect.org

CHINA GDC
July 24th to 26th
Shanghai, China
www.chinagdc.com

GAMES CONVENTION ONLINE
July 31st to August 2nd
Leipzig, Germany
www.gamesconvention.com

AUGUST 2009

EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE
August 13th to 14th
Edinburgh, Scotland
edinburghinteractivefestival.com

GDC EUROPE
August 17th to 19th
Cologne, Germany
www.gdceurope.com

GAMESCOM
August 19th to 23rd
Cologne, Germany
www.gamescom-cologne.com

SEPTEMBER 2009

GDC AUSTIN
September 14th to 18th
Texas, USA
www.gdcaustin.com

GAME CONVENTION ASIA
September 17th to 20th
Singapore
www.gc-asia.sg

OCTOBER 2009

GDC CHINA 2009
October 11th to 13th
Shanghai, China
china.gdconf.com

CASUAL CONNECT KYIV
October 22nd to 24th
Kyiv, Ukraine
kyiv.casualconnect.org

LONDON GAMES FESTIVAL
W/C October 26th
London, UK
www.londongamesfestival.com

LONDON GAMES CONFERENCE
October 27th
London, UK
www.mcvuk.com/events

DECEMBER 2009

GAME CONNECTION EUROPE
December 8th to 10th
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www.game-connection.com

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WorldView

Our monthly digest of the past month's global games news…

DEALS

Microsoft has confirmed that Dundee-based **Ruffian Games** is developing *Crackdown 2*.

Bungie may not be owned by **Microsoft** but it still works closely with it – the two are working on another *Halo* game, this time a prequel called *Reach*.

Ubisoft has signed a deal to publish the next title from **Tetsuya Mizuguchi**, creator of *Rez* and *Sega Rally*. The game is currently codenamed 'Eden'.

Remedy has signed up to use **Umbra**'s rendering optimisation toolset to give a speed boost to its long-running project *Alan Wake*.

Spanish studio **Mercury Steam** has tweaked its deal with **Konami**. The new IP the publisher signed from the team has been rebranded to a *Castlevania* title.

Ubisoft has signed a deal to develop the game of Spielberg's *Tintin* movie. Its French Montpelier studio will handle the production.

To better support its new motion sensing controller, **Sony** has added **AiLive**'s gesture recognition tech to the PS3 SDK. It's free to all licenced developers.

SPECIAL REPORT

UNDERSTANDING 'DIGITAL BRITAIN'

Last month the UK Government took the wraps off its *Digital Britain* report, which aimed to look at ways the country's digital sectors can and will develop further.

It made major suggestions for games development, but the 240-page tome hardly makes for easy or quick reading. Here, we summarise the key five topics in the report which matter most to developers across Britain…

GAME CERTIFICATION

WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

The Government will use a 'strengthened system' of game classification which will be based on the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) standard, complemented by the Video Standards Council. Say bye-bye to BBFC ratings.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DEVELOPERS:

Proposals for a universal classification system were raised with consumers in mind, and a wholesale shift to a universal PEGI system is not likely to create a significant change in the way developers think about games. Unless, of course, their content is considerably mature.

Early plans indicate that developers will be given the power to self-declare a rating for PEGI to consider. With all games now going to one body for approval, key to how deep and failsafe this process is will depend on the number of staff available at PEGI.

The BBFC has previously criticised the scarcity of people available to evaluate the PEGI system. "There are two people in the Video Standards Council who check the PEGI system in the UK," said the group last year.

However, the VSC now has authority to monitor the process – a necessary measure in ensuring that submitting companies don't try their luck.

Meanwhile, the use of a three-person expert panel to enforce game bans is one of the most crucial changes affecting developers. The VSC is already suggesting that this 'execution panel' will reduce the chances of a game ban being successfully appealed.

BROADBAND

WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

1) The Government is aiming to give broadband access to 'virtually every household' in the UK, all with a minimum speed of 2Mb/sec, by no later than 2012.
2) 90 per cent of the UK will receive 'next generation' broadband by 2017.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DEVELOPERS:

Perhaps more than you think. All-round, the push for faster and better internet connection supports the games industry on a number of fronts.

Such growth in high-speed internet access is a necessary step in the potential cloud-gaming revolution. Faster speeds will also help stimulate the popularity of services such as Steam, PSN, Xbox Live and WiiWare, as a wider number of consumers become more ingrained in 'net culture. It should be noted that the minimum connection speed needed for OnLive is 1.5Mb/sec, while HD gaming requires 5Mb/sec. David Perry's Gaikai system hasn't revealed its speed requirements yet.

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PIRACY

WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

1) The Government wants to cut down unlawful filesharing by a staggering 70-80 per cent in the UK within two years.
2) The Government denounced the use of filesharing, but added that most people 'much prefer not to do wrong' if given a reasonable choice. It has therefore launched a wide-ranging solution on illicit filesharing that spans ISP monitoring, education, and stimulating the growth of legal markets.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DEVELOPERS:

For content owners, developers and publishers, piracy remains the single most important issue raised in the *Digital Britain* report. Games like *Spore* have reportedly lost close to half of their total market through piracy.

Yet illicit file sharing remains a global problem, not a UK one. Even if the Paper's ambitious plan to cut piracy in the UK by 70 per cent was met, it would fail to have a noticeable effect on the hugely popular and accessible game torrents.

People who illicitly download video games also tend to be the people who know how to mod a console, how to use a crack file and how to find a keygen. They are embedded in a culture which seems more resistive to a letter through the post, as it has been resistive to all copyright protection measures in the past.

The measures have already been criticised for being too easy-handed on the issue.

TAX BREAKS

WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

1) The Government has 'committed to work with the industry to collect and review the evidence for a tax relief.'
2) Plans are in place to 'promote the sustainable production' for 'culturally British video games.'

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DEVELOPERS:

UK developers who exercised their voice to stimulate change should be proud of making an impact on the Government's decisions, regardless of the unknown result.

Regarding the tax break system, nothing concrete is set. The Government has asked for more time, during which publishers will continue to move their work to cheaper talent bases, bigger vacuums will be created in the UK development workforce, and developers will continue to look to work overseas.

Yet thanks to a number of groups and bodies, particularly Tiga, the relationship between the Government and the games industry has never been tighter. And so, there has never been a more likely time for Westminster to answer the calls of the development community. Fittingly, such a call has never been more needed.

Furthermore, if tax breaks are introduced to the game sector, there is a chance that they will only be available to a certain type of game. As the *Digital Britain* report states:

"In film, a system of cultural tax credits has long helped to sustain a wide range of films that speak to a British narrative, rather than the cultural perspectives of Hollywood or multinational collaborations. Other countries such as Canada, for similar reasons, extend the model of cultural tax relief beyond the film industry to the interactive and online worlds."

Bearing in mind that the Paper stated that a review was being considered for 'culturally British video games,' there may be a real chance that any game tax breaks will shift which types of games come from the region.

SKILLS

WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

1) The Government will strongly support graduate and post-Graduate courses that feature 'hard' Science, Technology and Mathematical skills.
2) The Government will consider a new Usability Centre for Video Games.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DEVELOPERS:

A better selection of graduates will slowly trickle in as 'hard' sciences are aimed to gain more prominence in UK Universities.

While Abertay University in Scotland remains a central education centre for the industry, further connections to academia have always been vital. The proposed Usability Centre for Video Games, if it is indeed greenlit, would further train students with more relevant skills and experience in game production.

Tiga CEO Richard Wilson told *Develop* that the new skills proposals were encouraging for development studios.

"So often, when we talk about skills shortages in the games industry a lot of the debates seem to revolve around games courses. So it's really good to see the Government recognising that some of these more traditional 'hard' sciences are really important to the sector."

This report is an abridged version of a Develop Online report, originally published on June 18th.

SAY WHAT?!?

"People don't respect confidentiality in this industry. It's tough enough to keep a secret in your own company, much less with third parties."

SCEA boss Jack Tretton grumbles about the PSPgo and Motion Sensor controllers being leaked pre-E3. Newsflash, Jack: people like to gossip.

"ZENIMAX???????? Disgusting."

Via Twitter John Romero reacts to news of id's acquisition. For shame, John: you had another 113 characters left to vent bile with!

"I'm concerned about Sony; the PS3 is losing a bit of momentum and they don't make it easy for me to support the platform. We might have to stop supporting Sony."

Now that he runs the world's biggest publisher, it seems Activision chief Bobby Kotick can say what the hell he wants. Or is he just bluffing?

"We're not going to do another one… The bloom is really off the rose for licensed games."

EA's Frank Gibeau says there are no plans for another game span out of The Godfather. But maybe it was the choice of licence that was the big problem…

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INDUSTRY ANALYSIS SPONSORED BY Bethesda SOFTWORKS

COMMENT: BUSINESS

The best things in life are free

by **Rick Gibson,** Games Investor Consulting

It's an old adage and one that's normally almost meaningless in a commercial environment. But, paradoxically, it is being proven true for some of the most profitable games companies: giving away your content can be a great way of generating surprisingly healthy revenues.

For many, free is at worst pure anathema, or at best a marketing ploy that comes off your bottom line. For the music, film and television industries, free is the devil incarnate, and as they drag their heads out of the sand, they continue to lose arms and legs to piracy. While they procrastinated, consumer behaviour changed irreversibly, and legal threats have barely stemmed the flow. But more recently, cannier companies have tested 'new' commercial models. For example, Nokia buys a year of music rights from music publishers and bundles it into the snappily-named 'Comes With Music' service so consumers can listen for free. Eventually it will cost them a little, but by then the logic holds they will be hooked and see the value. Laid bare, CWM is the kind of digital subscription service plus free trial period that games have used for over a decade.

> ***"Such high percentages of loss-leading development necessitates careful consideration on the dividing line of free and premium."***

Fears about piracy aside, games companies have been exploiting 'free' for ages, particularly in the online space. Classic subscriptions with free trial periods are the bread and butter of many of the largest online games companies. This model would be boring if it weren't so profitable. Try before you buy is the staple of retail downloads in casual and core spheres. Despite falling expenditure, advertising in casual games is the primary way companies like Spil and Miniclip monetise their vast audiences. On a smaller scale, advergaming gives brands exposure to millions of players by seeding game sites with free Flash products.

FREE'S THE MAGIC NUMBER

Free can be more than a marketing vehicle for premium content or services, and becomes really interesting – and profitable – when free becomes an integral part of the game service. Examples abound, but perhaps the best known are the permanently free play areas of *Runescape* or *Dofus*, which are designed to expose players to all the cool stuff they could get if they subscribed. NeoEdge and WildTangent have proved advertising's potential to subsidise free casual game downloads and generate more revenue than digital retail. More commercially aggressive are casual MMOs, such as those from Aeria or Gameforge, that offer vast free play areas where gameplay progression is significantly enhanced by purchasing items and upgrades, or even surprisingly short-term services. Another fascinating example is sponsorship from 20th Century Fox brokered by WildTangent that unlocked new characters and quests for free in *AdventureQuest*.

Another is the rare trophies earned for free in-game that are auctioned in primary markets such as those operated by SGN in Facebook, or used as collectible game counters in other games (such as cafe.com). The use of gifting – premium items purchased by one person with real money and given for free to friends – in social network games is another. Perhaps the most outlandish is the purchase of annuities in China's *ZT Online*, which pay out virtual currency as players reach level thresholds in theoretically free games. The trick here is that level progression in this game requires such significant additional expenditure via microtransactions that the operator usually comes out on top.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

"But it's not really free is it?," I hear you say – how much of Sony's *Free Realms*, for instance, is actually free? A quick peek reveals surprising amounts, from 10 per cent to 75 per cent in *Free Realms*' case. Such high percentages of loss-leading development and service expenditure necessitate very careful consideration about the dividing line between free and premium content, with particular emphasis on how to encourage players towards premium content. These deliberations involve data-crunching and experimentation, tricky decisions about premium currencies, community drivers and assessments of the pervasiveness of upselling mechanisms. These are complex decisions for even the most experienced operators, particularly because redrawing the line can be difficult post-launch.

Sony's Free Realms has broken the three million player barrier in less than two months

The critical difference between online games and other media in this regard is that these companies can usually define what is free and what is not by controlling access to their servers, whereas music publishers – and traditional games publishers for that matter – can only fight a rearguard action against piracy, and find other ways to entice, cajole or threaten players to respect their IP rights.

So how much money can be made from 'free'? As you may expect, there's a rising scale of average revenue per paying user per month, but the most profitable companies we track can generate over £15 in ARPU per paying user per month from 'freemium' content, which is saying something when hundreds of thousands of paying users are playing. The result is that we expect Europe to boast its first $100m+ revenue freemium companies in 2009.

So the adage may be true – not only are the best things in life free, some of the most profitable games are free too.

Rick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries.
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COMMENT: INDUSTRY

Who killed the video game star?

by Owain Bennallack

Duke Nukem Forever being canned after a decade in development elicited three general responses:

1. Surprise that *Duke Nukem Forever* had been canned.

2. Surprise that *Duke Nukem Forever* was still in development.

3. A '*Duke Nukem* Whoever' from anyone under 20.

As someone the wrong side of 30, the announcement did surprise me – a bit like hearing a *Blue Peter* presenter had died young. But in a wider sense, I'm not shocked. *Duke Nukem* hailed from what's looking like the last hurrah for iconic video game characters. We may not see his like again.

PROJECT YOURSELF

Call the lawyers off – I know we will see his like again, not least because 3D Realms is to continue to create games based on the *Duke* franchise.

I'm talking in the broad brush terms beloved of pundits: with digital technology, the recent big advances have been about self-expression and personalisation, not playing at being someone else. *Rock Band*, *Wii Fit* and *Guitar Hero* are physical manifestations of this – extending the game out to wrap around the player, rather than asking him to assume an identity in the game world.

Even as I've been typing, Microsoft has gone one better with Project Natal. Interacting with Lionhead's Milo demo looks like the future. Playing as Milo the Wonder Boy and enduring his mannerisms and quips passed off as my own? That sounds like the past.

Yes, the Project Natal demos and their predecessors mostly still feature an avatar on screen. But you're certainly not living through the immersive story predicted by game futurists a decade ago. You're living your story, in your living room, not *Parappa the Rapper*'s.

More traditional hit games like *Fable 2*, *Fallout 3* and *World of Warcraft* also let the player define their character right down to the bootstraps, rather than forcing them to dress up in a designer's vision. RPGs are nothing new, but their move to the mainstream is – and with kids growing up expecting customisable avatars thanks to the likes of *Club Penguin*, there's no going back.

ICONOMY CLASS

Even where games do still showcase playable characters, they're rarely distinctive like the icons of ten to 20 years ago. There are exceptions: Nico Bellic and Sackboy, for example. But compared to the start of the 'modern' game era in the mid- to-late-1990s – when you couldn't walk through E3 without tripping over an actor dressed as a hero or seeing some giant game star looming down – characters as frontmen just aren't setting the agenda.

It may be that as we head deeper into the Uncanny Valley, the hammy scripted acting of near-photorealistic lead characters is becoming unbearable. Cartoon-ish heroes don't jar in the same way – Sackboy is as effective as Mario 25 years ago. But there are fewer of these stylised or even 'childish' games about, so less focus on iconic characters.

> ***"Even where games do still showcase playable characters, they're rarely distinctive like the icons of ten to 20 years ago."***

Instead, in the quest for a palatable realism, player characters are becoming less distinct – even as they become more graphically detailed.

The caricature that is Duke Nukem will therefore live longer in the memory than Faith from *Mirror's Edge* or *Call of Duty*'s Soap MacTavish. Or think of Naughty Dog's output – from Sonic-rivalling Crash Bandicoot, through Jak and Daxter to Nathan Drake of *Uncharted*. The latter is richer in narrative than the previous titles or most other games for that matter, but could you honestly describe the hero?

Dressing up Sackboy lets players express their individuality, but does it mean an end to iconic heroes?

GTA IV's Nico Bellic is the exception that proves the rule, personality wise, and the odd player character still manages to combine pseudo-realism with some physical uniqueness – *Gears of War*'s Marcus Fenix is nothing if not a bland cliché, yet physically he can be recognised from a silhouette.

But in general, today's heroes hardly linger. The Max Paynes of yesteryear – another 3D Realms creation, incidentally – are melting away into the NPC crowd as we players demand the starring role.

Owain Bennallack is executive editor of *Develop*. He edited the magazine from its launch until its February 2006 issue. He has also worked at *MCV* and *Edge*, and has provided consultancy and evaluation services to several leading developers and publishers. He is also chairman of the Develop Conference advisory board.

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COMMENT: DESIGN

Giving games an extra life

by Billy Thomson, Ruffian Games

Piracy is still a fairly big problem to the publishers and developers of the gaming world, but there now exists a potentially greater threat to the livelihood of the people responsible for actually making the games, and it comes in what would appear to be a completely benign form: the second-hand market.

The second-hand market is massive right now and, while it's incredibly convenient for gamers, it starves the publishers and developers of the much needed – and deserved – revenue to keep them in business, therefore allowing them to continue making the great games we all love. The reason for this is simple: all of the profit from the second hand market sales goes to the retailer rather than the publisher and developer.

This problem has caused publishers to push developers hard to create reasons for the gaming public to hold on to their game rather than sell it on at a cut price. So while the second hand market is healthy and strong, how can the game development community give their games that much needed extra life?

For the rest of this article I'll talk about the current most popular methods that many developers are employing to keep players playing many months – sometimes years – after they originally purchased their game.

MULTIPLAYER GAMEPLAY

Having a fantastic solo game is generally not enough to keep players interested for anything more than a month or two these days. In recent times very few of the biggest franchises have been released without some form of multiplayer option.

Some developers aim at the casual market, creating games that are played competitively on the same box where all the family can get involved and have fun. The Wii has cornered the market in this area. Quite simply put, nobody does this better than Nintendo. Some of the most commercially successful titles of the past few years are on the Wii, and despite being released almost three years ago they are still selling in droves at full retail price.

Other developers are focusing on a more tried and tested slice of the market: the hardcore gamer. Bungie, Infinity Ward and Epic are the big hitters in this area. Not only do they create quality solo game experiences, they back them up with compelling co-operative and competitive online multiplayer game modes. These online game modes create self-sufficient communities that drive continued online play, and they also do a great job of marketing the game through word of mouth. These kinds of gaming communities are the very life blood of these developers.

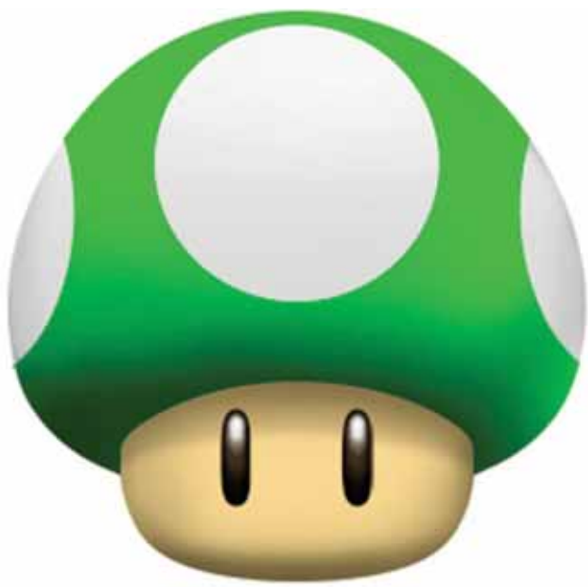
ONLINE PROGRESSION

The addition of online services like Xbox Live – and to a lesser extent PSN and Wi-Fi Connect – have allowed developers to arm their games with progression-based features that drive continuous online play. The goal here is to create a feature set that allows players to feel like every minute they spend playing the game is worthwhile; everything they do will enhance their online status and improve their gameplay experience.

> ***"Having a fantastic solo game is generally not enough to keep players interested for anything more than a month or two these days."***

Some games do nothing more than provide a rank that constantly increases for gameplay hours logged online. Others do a far better job where online-only performance or skill-based objectives must be completed to unlock new functional content that not only increases their rank but also alters their gaming experience.

No game does this better than the fantastic *COD4* – it's an incredibly simple concept but it's been implemented to near perfection. The more gamers play the better they get, the better they get the more they progress, the more they progress the more renowned they become. It's a system that almost allows gamers to become online gaming celebrities.



Flghting the second-hand market shouldn't be about one-use codes, says Thomson, but about giving replayability a 1UP

DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT

DLC is easily the best way to keep gamers interested in your game, and it's a way for publishers and developers to maintain a revenue stream for their game regardless of the effect of the second-hand market.

The only problem with DLC is the variation in the content available and the prices set. There have been various different types of DLC released in the past couple of years; some were very well received by the gaming community while others were condemned.

From my own point of view the DLC that has served its games well has been gameplay-focused. New functional content that delivers new ways to play is better than new aesthetic content that does nothing more than dress the game up in a different way.

The aesthetic content route is one that I personally detest. Yes, publishers and developers need to make money and there are easy ways to get money from loyal gaming communities, but there's only so much that these gamers will take, as a few developers have realised to their detriment – and rightly so.

Billy Thomson is the creative director of newly-formed developer Ruffian Games. Billy has over 13 years experience of designing video games, including design roles on *Grand Theft Auto* and *GTA2*, before working as lead designer on Realtime Worlds' celebrated *Crackdown*.
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COMMENT: CODING

Lagging behind the competition

by David Jefferies, Black Rock Studio

Input lag used to be a big deal in games. For a game like *Street Fighter*, it was imperative that it ran at 60 frames per second and processed the inputs from the gamer as quickly as possible. It felt fast, responsive and fair. A game running at 60fps processes a single frame in 16 milliseconds, and so the resulting action from your input would be on screen within 32ms. That's fast.

In this era of wireless controllers, LCD panels and lots of 30fps games I thought it would be interesting to trace the lag that we see in our games today.

ESSEX LAGS

I'm going to define lag as the time it takes between a button touching its contact points on the gamepad to the resulting action being seen on screen. I'm going to assume a typical setup of a modern console such as an Xbox 360, PS3 or Wii with a wireless control pad connected to an LCD display.

When the button is pressed, the wireless gamepad packages up the state of the pad and encodes for sending. It doesn't continuously broadcast; instead it sends bursts of data at short intervals in order to conserve battery power. The console receives and decodes the wireless packet and presents it to the game code for processing. The console manufactures claim this process takes between 10ms and 14ms. I'll take the average of 12ms for this article.

The first thing your game loop should do is read the pad inputs. If your game is running at 30fps then the game will spend the next 32ms updating the game state and building a command buffer ready to be rendered by the GPU. Remember, the gamepad packet could have arrived after the game loop has started processing and so will have to wait until the next loop begins which will impose a further delay of up to 32ms.

Next, the GPU will consume the command buffer and will take another 32ms to render the frame. When the GPU has finished and the framebuffer is presented to the drivers for display the elapsed time from pushing the button is about 76ms in the best case. In the worst case where the wireless packet arrives just after the processing has started, the time is 108ms. If your game is running at 60fps then these figures are 44ms and 60ms respectively.

Now the framebuffer is ready to be displayed. If your display device is a CRT then that's the end of the story, because a CRT is a streaming device and will start to display the image immediately.

LCD-REAM

LCDs, however, do additional processing before displaying the image. Manufacturers like to measure the lag of their LCDs using pixel response times, which is the amount of time it takes a pixel to change to the required colour. However, this isn't the whole story: we are also interested in the lag introduced by the processing that happens before the LCD is ready to display the image. This lag is called circuit delay, and the total lag of an LCD is the circuit delay time added to the pixel response time.

> ***"Amateur tests show that, astonishingly, LCDs have a lag of between 30ms and 80ms, with the average being around 40ms."***

None of the major LCD manufacturers publish their circuit delay times, and it's become apparent to industry observers that the processing they perform in order to decrease pixel response times has significantly increased circuit delay time.

In the absence of manufacturer specifications, there has been amateur research into circuit delay times. These amateur tests show that, astonishingly, LCDs have a lag of between 30ms and 80ms with the average being around 40ms. Combine this average with the wireless lag and inherent lag of the game, and a 30fps game will have a lag of up to 150ms with a 60fps game fairing a bit better at 100ms. Compare this to a classic arcade game with a 32ms lag and it's up to five times worse.

So games are significantly less responsive than they used to be, but is this really a problem? Well, yes: the extreme lag that we're talking about here will definitely make the controls seem more sluggish than they should be. It would make one of the original fighting games like *Street Fighter* virtually unplayable, because these games require responses within such tight windows of opportunity that adding all this additional latency would simply make it too difficult.

Wireless controllers, such as these microphones, have introduced another layer of lag – but it's LCDs that are slowing modern response times

But the good news is that LCD manufacturers are starting to wake up to this issue, and some specialists are including a 'through' mode where the LCD does no processing and so the input lag is reduced to almost nothing. Let's hope the big brands catch up soon.

David Jefferies started in the industry at Psygnosis in Liverpool in 1995, eventually working on *Global Domination* and *WipEout 3*. He later moved to Rare where he worked on the *Perfect Dark* and *Donkey Kong* franchises. Next came a move down to Brighton to join Black Rock Studio (which was then known as Climax Racing) in 2003. On this generation of consoles he's been the technical director of *MotoGP'06* and *MotoGP'07* before starting work on new racer *Split/Second*.
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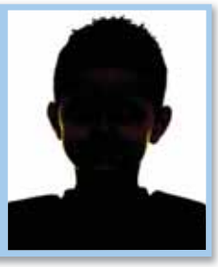

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GO ON, TRY IT

Sony is urging the games industry to start making more games for the PlayStation Portable. How will it win studios over? **Michael French** discovers a new action plan that seems set to open the platform up for new developers…

If there's one challenge Sony has faced during the latest hardware generation it's developer support.

While Planet PlayStation hasn't exactly struggled, developers have had tough choices on what platform to make games for. Microsoft has comfortably become market leader on next-gen, Nintendo can do whatever the hell it wants and hits the jackpot every time, and even Apple pretty much subverted the entire business model for handheld games creation and distribution. And often, developers have bet against PlayStation; outside of specific exclusives Sony has had to sign or develop itself, there's certainly a contrast between the situation on PS3 today and PS2's embarrassment of riches.

For PSP specifically, the situation is arguably worse – it's sold an impressive 50m units, but software support is thin on the ground; Sony has even claimed that piracy has harmed the format's commercial performance.

ON THE ROPES

Sony is prepared to fight and change this, however. At E3, it took the boldest step any format holder has made so far into digital distribution by confirming the October release of PSPgo, which has no optical media drive – games must be downloaded for it.

Apple's activity aside for one moment, it's arguably a flashpoint in the traditional relationship games platform holders and their content creators have with retail, the primary source of their revenues. Now games for Sony's handheld can be sold both on disc for older models or digitally for newer ones – and the emphasis is on the latter.

> ***"We're introducing new initiatives for the PSP which take it beyond traditional gaming and also includes new developers."***
>
> *Zeno Colaço, SCEE*

But simply introducing new hardware isn't enough to restimulate interest in a platform from both consumers and the industry. It needs content, and fast. And while there's always a chicken and egg scenario when it comes to launch games for new hardware and the consumers that play and pay for them, Sony's answer is this: don't just expect developers to step up.

Instead find newer, younger and digitally-focused teams, let them make what they want, simplify the submission and QA process for these titles, then release them in a specially branded area of the PlayStation Store at 'aggressive' (read: low) price points.

In other words: copy all the good things Apple has brought to the table with its iPhone and App Store, and then apply that to its own hardware.

Disclaimer: Sony doesn't like the iPhone comparison. Its execs and spokespeople say the company isn't worried by the platform and its cheap development tools and almost-barrierless distribution pipe, isn't responding to Apple's new grip on developer mindshare, and is confident a games-only focus will keep it on course. Yeah, it has to say that.

What it will admit, however, is the speed with which that company has found its niche, how transformative digital distribution is being to consumer tastes and behaviour, and how Sony is now prepared to harness these things and catch up.

FIGHTING BACK

Zeno Colaço, head of developer relations at Sony Europe, is a 16 year veteran of SCEE, one of its longest-serving employees – he's also the man leading this new charge.

He tells *Develop*: "One of the things that has been exciting in my time at Sony is the big shift changes we have seen – the latest is that consumers have been consuming digital content in a totally different way."

Back when the PSP first arrived in late 2005, "we didn't have other devices in the market". The slick device effectively arrived in a vacuum where no one knew what would happen next – namely that first the DS would surprise everyone by outselling the PSP, and

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then that Apple would swagger in with its one-size-fits all smartphone and wow developers. These things were a bit of a rude awakening for Sony, no doubt.

"Sony's been working very hard to find our position in that and bring top-end gaming to not just the consumers who were there for the launch of PSP, but extending to an audience that is changing how it consumes entertainment and applications."

Colaço says the PSPgo and Sony's extension into the market of digital content is designed to match those consumer expectations: "But it's not as if we haven't embarked on this road already over the last few years."

He's not wrong. PlayStation 3 might have the smaller installed base of the current consoles, but its PlayStation Network has long strived to push the envelope digitally. A mix of its internally developed games have either debuted simultaneously online and at retail (*GT5 Prologue*) or franchises have gone online-only (*WipEout*).

But in an age where Apple can boast hundreds of thousands of SDK downloads, 50,000 applications on its store and one billion app downloads, the format-holder seems to be finally acknowledging that can be done.

Which brings us to that new initiative to reinvigorate development for the PSP.

Or, in Sony-speak, a bid to 'widen the content experience'. Explains Colaço: "We're introducing new initiatives for the PSP which take it beyond traditional gaming, but still includes elements from gaming, and also includes new developers."

So the PSP is no longer just for 'traditional' games developers.

"To help that along the way there has been the significant drop of price for development," adds Colaço. Announced at E3, the drop is definitely as significant as he says, down a massive 80 per cent – in Europe that means down from €5,000 to €1,200. (Apple might boast a '$99 SDK' but that doesn't include the $599 minimum spend on a Mac to code on, a $200 iPhone or iPod Touch, and any other supplementary tools or software you want to use.) "That's a significant entry point for developers making additional content," adds Colaço.

Plus, he says, by the end of 2009, the content pipeline for PSP will be 'streamlined'. That includes "new processes and ways to bring product to market, digitally distributed through the PlayStation Network Store". These titles will have their own dedicated place in the Store – "they will be described and placed differently to how you see current on the PSN today".

All of that should make the PSP something that "evolves in line with the way consumers change the way they buy content."

SMALL STEP, GIANT LEAP

Sony spokespeople and execs paint this latest phase of PlayStation Portable's lifespan as not being any great, sudden thing. Call it 'a new initiative' and they baulk. But clearly, things have changed. The devkit price drop from E3 is proof – as, more importantly, are the developers the company has on board to make these smaller titles for the PSP's new digital lease of life.

> ***"You don't see this happening at Microsoft and you even don't see it happening at Nintendo yet."***
>
> *Ash Monif, Subatomic*

"We've been working behind the scenes to have content available for launch," explains Colaço. Sony has looked far and wide for partners, he says, and there's a clutch of developers with previous publishing relationships with Sony, plus new developers, charged with creating content for the PSP.

These are a mix of the traditional and the unlikely: Subatomic, developer of the popular iPhone tower defence game *Fieldrunners*, is producing version of its game for the PSP; Funtank, owner of casual games site Candystand, is making the surprising switch from PC casual to handheld; Indian studio Gameshastra is working on ten downloadable titles; meanwhile Creat, already one of the more popular PSN publishers (even though it is an independent studio first and foremost) for PS3, is producing a raft of titles as well.

Specific profiles of these four can be found over the page, but they are just the tip of the iceberg: Colaço says that 50 European developers are working on games for PSPgo, with many more globally. "These studios are a true illustration of us saying that we are broadening the platform and introducing new forms of content, and proves that behind the scenes there is a representation of what we are doing," he explains.

Sony and its new development partners plan to quickly gauge consumer reactions to their products and change things accordingly. Colaço says he expects the evolving nature of the PSP production pipeline (*see 'Pipe Dream'*) means it will be vastly different in a year than it will be when the PSPgo arrives.

"As with all new things you shape the process along the way, and they've helped us define how we're changing the distribution pipe. What's also happening is that we are in a changing market, where we've had relatively small experience; we're watching from the outside," he adds, with the allusion to iPhone clear. That said, he points out that Sony isn't completely dropping the barriers around PSP to turn it into a free-for-all: "This is very much a PlayStation experience and is all about its high values. It's not content which is secondary – it's about content that is important to the consumer and things they are looking to buy."

And buy it they will – at least that's the plan. Because this new kind of PSP content isn't going be expensive. Even though it has no name yet, the area of the Store that hosts these games and applications will be "a place in the PlayStation world that has a different kind of content and entertainment – and perhaps a more aggressive price point to reflect the type of content you are getting," says Colaço.

But still, he firm insists that this isn't a major change to its strategy, more an evolution of what went before.

"This is not the start of a project, it's an evolution to look at what other markets are doing and how consumers are changing. We've got a real international mix of developers working on games for PSPgo – and rightly so; digitally the barriers to entry are much lower. Not only are the pipelines reduced but the barriers to testing products are also much lower."

He adds that a 'managed process' will dictate how the platform will keep opening up – suggesting that there will be even more to talk about, but Sony is being careful. (As we go to press there are rumours abound about more active pursuing of non-game apps, and even Sony's plans to make a games-focused phone, too.)

Yet the widened remit means that more developers will be able to participate, he admits – a definite change from before.

OUT OF THE BOX

Ultimately Colaço's final words to us are the biggest confirmation – whether the format holder likes to admit it or not – that Sony has changed, has become smarter about the market around it, is now willing to play against rivals at their own game and be more aggressive around digital content.

"On PSP we are trying to reduce the barriers to entry some developers would have had in the physical goods route to market. We're very excited about how existing developers on other PlayStation platforms will contribute to this and how those from other mobile platforms or even those who haven't worked on the platform before will come to it.

"Things have changed now – the best products don't necessarily have to come from a retail box."

PIPE DREAM

ONE OF THE MORE interesting points about Sony's changing approach to PSP development is talk of a 'streamlined content pipeline'. But what does that really mean?

Zeno Colaço, head of developer relations at SCEE, explains: "The two or three things that are very obvious is that if the content is packaged as a smaller application then QA will be lighter. We are looking for the market to decide on what works and what doesn't. So concept approval – which is a term I don't like and we don't use in Europe – we won't have at all, globally. It's about allowing the content find its own space because it's the market embracing it. And there is a self-regulating aspect as it is still a professional environment, you still need a development kit and you still need to have investment and a team. But it can be a small team. We don't see any of the restrictions on the disc-based space being in this space."

FOUR PLAY

Meet the four studios which prove how much PSP games development is changing…

Funtank/Candystand

AKA: THE CASUAL GAMES SPECIALIST

FUNTANK IS owner of Candystand, one of the premiere casual games sites on the web which boasts over 170 'low-barrier titles' for mass market consumers.

Since it was launched in 1997, the firm says its Flash and Shockwave games have been played over two billion times on PC – and now they are heading to PSP.

"We were thrilled when Sony reached out with the idea that we could take our premium products from Candystand and make new versions of our most popular games," the firm's president Scott Tannen explains to *Develop*.

"We'll take our games that are tried and tested in the marketplace, with 10m to 20m plays a piece, and bring premium versions to the PSP."

Candystand, which was previously owned by chewing gum and sweets firm Wrigley, also has a strange claim to fame – the creation of advergames. That's something the firm wants to bring to PSP, chiming

with the idea that the format can host cheaper 'pocket money' games and new titles.

By allowing new kinds of games and apps on the platform, the PSP is ripe to exploit this business model, says Tannen: "One place we are going to innovate is by creating a forum for large companies, premium advertisers like Coca-Cola to bring their games ad-supported a free to consumers, digitally through the PSP. We believe that will create a number of opportunities – for advertisers and consumers this means we can offer rewarding content that is fun to play, but also free."

Gameshastra

AKA: THE EMERGING MARKET CHAMPION

GAMESHASTRA IS based in Hyderabad, India and actually started working with Sony in 2006 on building the region's nascent development community.

"India is more famous for IT and IT outsourcing, but we saw an opportunity to use the great talent in the region for C++ and gaming," says vice president Rahul Sandil.

When it was founded, the firm first started as a QA business, but it was clear SCEE was interested in helping companies in India embrace games development; it was authorised in two weeks by Sony UK.

Since then Gameshastra has played a key part in SCEE's plans to introduce local content to drive sales of its hardware as it moved from a service company to a studio. Sandil explains: "The Indian games sector was growing and we came up with the idea of a game based on our forgotten backyard sports. The first person we pitched it to was Sony and we got a publishing deal."

Now the firm is working on five PSP games Sandil describes as 'snack' experiences, with five more on the drawing board after that.

"Not many developers get a chance to be picked up by Sony – this opportunity is very exciting not just because we are talking about new products but also our sweet spot is; casual games. There is a huge potential on PSP for casual games."

Adding more varied content to the device will grow the market for it in India, he adds "India is a country with 1bn people, 200m families – but just an install based of 300,000 PSPs. So the opportunity is immense, both in terms of hardware and software."

Creat

AKA: THE PSN PRO

FOUNDED IN 1990 and with studios in St Petersburg, Russia and Massacusetts, USA, Creat is the number two publisher for PlayStation Network games already thanks to previous releases like PS3 game *Magic Ball*.

Now it wants to repeat the success on PlayStation Portable.

"Sony has really given us an opportunity for innovation and support," says Scott Hyman, business development director.

"This new opportunity allows us to develop PSP games with much smaller scope than what we have been doing for the PSN.

"We have made other games for the PSP before, but our business model is really devoted to the downloadable space these days."

The studio already has three games on PSN, with three more announced, and a few more on the way by the end of they year.

The three heading for PlayStation Portable are *Alien Havoc*,

BubbleTrubble and *FreekScape*. According to Hyman the new PSP strategy "allows us now, with smaller games, to do things that are more innovative, with smaller price points and budgets – there is less of a risk and we can find out what it is that customers will gravitate towards".

He adds that in time that could mean a PS3 PlayStation Network title spun out of a PSP 'experiment', or even a bigger boxed release or compilation on disc: "It depends on what kind of feedback we get."

He adds: "The move to digital is a natural progression for us."

Subatomic

AKA: THE IPHONE INNOVATOR

AS CREATOR of *Fieldrunners* for iPhone and iPod Touch, Subatomic has already conquered one handheld platform, but now its tiny team wants to take on Sony's too.

Fieldrunners is described by COO Ash Monif as the 'premier tower defence game' – and it's hard to argue given glowing reviews from as far flung as Time magazine, and its status as an IGF winner. Oh, and it's a *Develop* favourite.

The PSP version will boast new content including exclusive maps, units and weapons, all of which should incentivise players.

"Part of the success we have experienced has been adding new content and offering new things to players," says Monif.

"We plan to do the same on PSP, so gamers and fans can look forward to more content on a regular basis. We feel that we will actually be able to bring a higher quality of service quicker and faster to the market through PSP."

He thinks Sony's new strategy will give rise to 'super-casual' games on the format: "This initiative is about bringing the lighter, lower barrier content to the PSP that has been so successful in other categories. You don't see this happening at Microsoft and you even don't see it happening at Nintendo yet. Part of that 'snackability' of the content is because you can deliver the content over WiFi super-fast. We're making games that are just 20MB each, that's less than a minute to download – instant gratification, snackable content. This is an opportunity for the premier indie developers – and I hope we represent that group – to come in and offer content that will fit the PSP."

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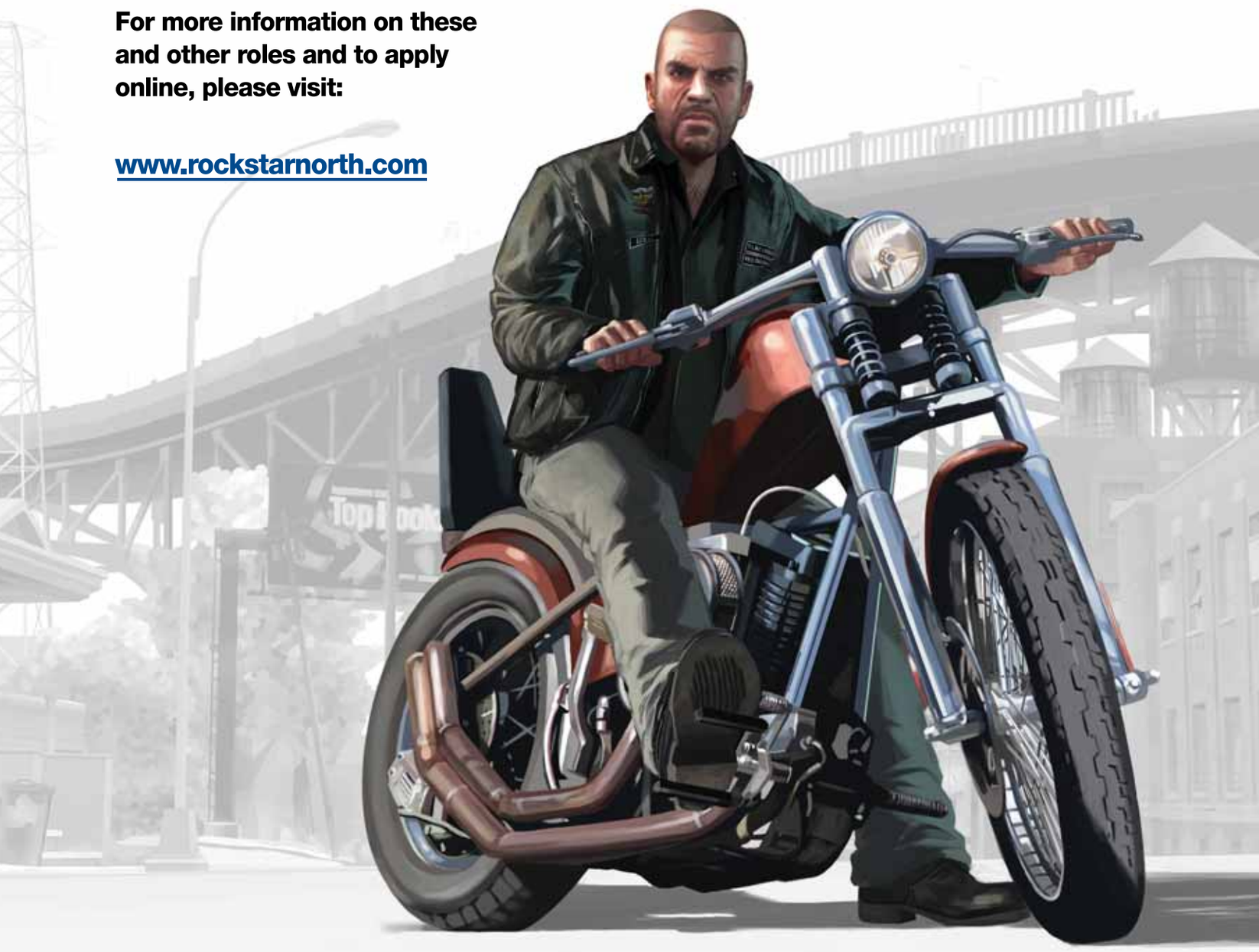
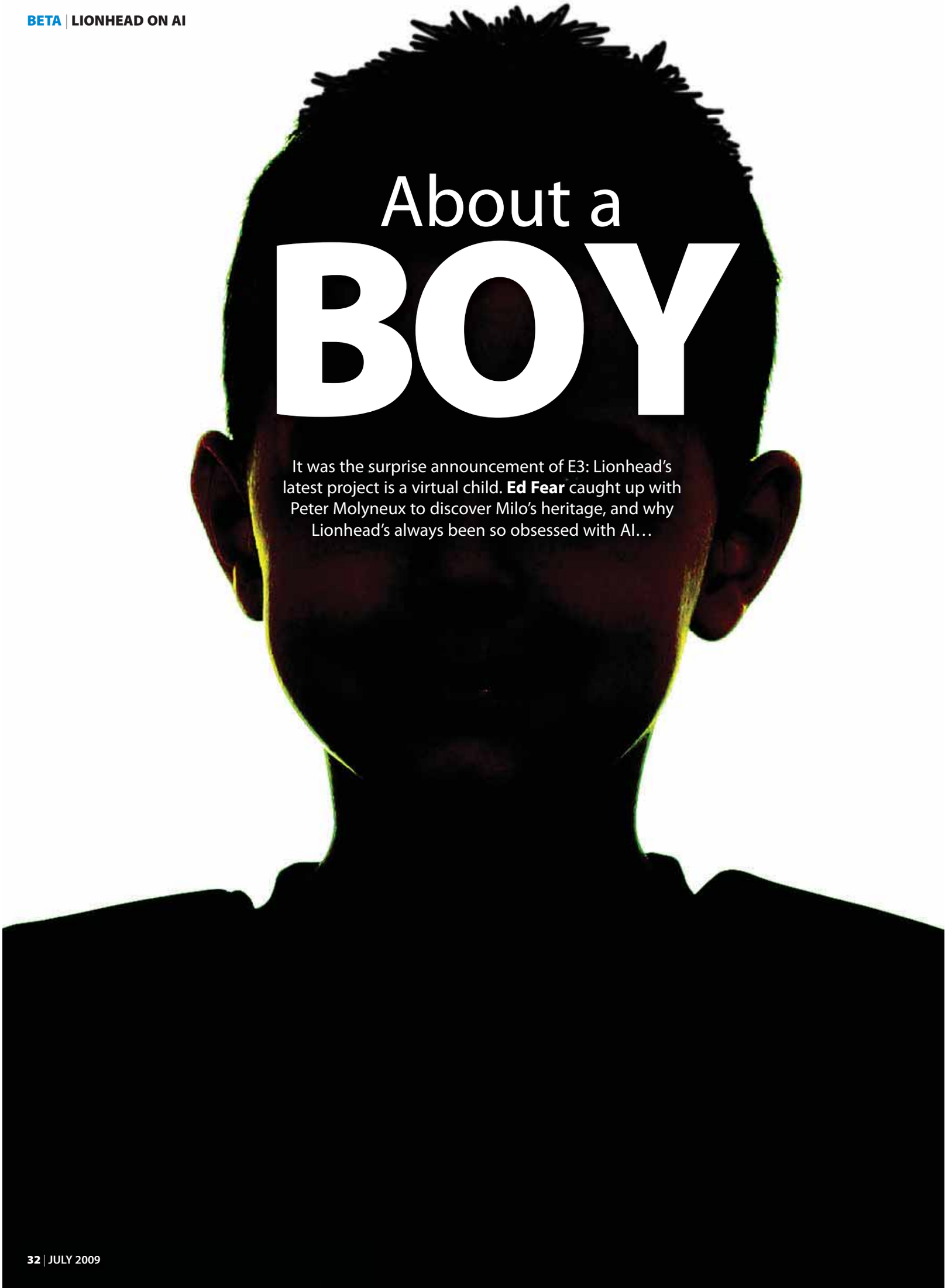




About a BOY

It was the surprise announcement of E3: Lionhead's latest project is a virtual child. **Ed Fear** caught up with Peter Molyneux to discover Milo's heritage, and why Lionhead's always been so obsessed with AI…

If there was one thing that generated a lot of buzz at E3, it was Microsoft's Project Natal – and, more specifically, Lionhead's latest curio: Milo, the virtual boy.

Similarly, nothing from E3 has been so misunderstood. Look at your average forum or blog and you'll find people polarised into two camps: those that believe it was an elaborate set-up, and those that believe it to be the biggest development in artificial intelligence and the beginning of a new era for human-computer interaction.

When we catch up with Peter Molyneux at E3, he isn't entirely surprised by the reaction. "People want to believe this so much," he tells us, laughing. "Journalists have already come in, having done research on the Turing Test, and stand there saying the classic question: 'Do you remember what we talked about yesterday?' But, of course, he's not really intelligent – what we're showing is a tentative first step towards making something that feels real. And by real, I mean that he's aware of you."

The truth, of course, is that Milo is equal parts smoke and mirrors as he is an intelligent agent; it's less cheating and more exploitation.

"An awful lot of Milo is like a Derren Brown mind trick," says Molyneux. "Derren Brown can't really read your mind, what he does is collect together a number of little tricks that tell him things. You've got to remember that we're not creating a piece of academic research; Milo can't actually think – we're just making the illusion that he can."

EMOTIONAL BLACKMAIL

What Milo typifies is a long-running ambition and interest that has permeated through each of Lionhead's titles: what Molyneux calls emotional AI.

"At Lionhead, we've always been fascinated by AI and using AI in gameplay. A lot of AI is academic research; funnelled down neural nets and learning – it's very antiseptic, there's no emotion behind it.

"It goes back further than Lionhead, back to Bullfrog, where we were playing around with these simulations of little people and their little minds. Emotional AI is not *real* AI; you couldn't write a paper on it, but it's how you use weak learning to make people think there's something going on there."

It stretches all the way back to *Populous*, Molyneux recalls, with people convinced that the villagers had intelligence and desires. "They swore that these little people exhibited fear, and curiosity, and ambition, and all of that stuff, when none of that was really there – it was just a random number saying 'walk left, walk right, walk on this path'. People think it's far deeper than it really is, but I guess that's still AI – it's this emotional AI.

"There was this stupid thing in *Theme Park* that got us a huge amount of press, but was really just a tiny thing: you could put a drinks stand next to a stall that sold chips, and then if you increased the salt content of the chips you'd sell more drinks. That wasn't real AI, but people thought it was great – that these little people were getting thirsty and everything, but it was just a single line of code. What's interesting is that, again, it's the belief that there's more going on behind the scenes than there really is. A lot of the time it's exploiting the numbers in a way that makes it look interesting."

But there was one title in particular that also cemented Lionhead's reputation when it came to AI, and something a little different than the emergence of behaviour in simulated communities. It was the company's first title, *Black and White*, that introduced the Creature – something that would shape almost everything that Lionhead has done since, from the dog in *Fable II* to Milo himself.

"The creature's mind was kind of a breakthrough. 'Mind' is an evocative word, but we had this system that was based upon desires – it had a desire to eat, a desire to be happy or angry. It had ways of satisfying those desires, say by eating or sleeping or being aggressive. And then there were actions that could satisfy those. And because those actions weren't fixed, the player could decide through interaction which desires were more important, and how they should be satisfied. That really felt like this was your creature – some people could say 'my creature likes eating crops from a field' whereas others could say 'my creature likes to eat people with blonde hair'. It went down to that resolution. This was much more like a mind; it wasn't a sterile neural net."

> ***"Emotional AI isn't real AI – you couldn't write a paper about it. It's how you use weak learning to make people think something is going on there."***

CREATURE FEATURE

It was from this, the experience of having created something complex that people felt attached to, that another project was born – the fabled and long-teased Dmitri, which eventually evolved into the Milo we see today. Having tackled a creature, the team found itself asking whether they would be able to do the same thing for humans. Could they create a virtual person that people would become attached to?

The first key decision – and one that still illicits sniggers from all over the industry – was that it would have to be a child.

"We knew we couldn't do an adult – adults are tough; they are complex and disturbed creatures," Molyneux explains. "As adults, we're the products of our childhoods and our experiences. Look into the eyes of an adult and there's all this history there. If you try to make a real one of those, it's very very tough to do. But children are semi-mad; they're unpredictable – and that means we can get away with a lot more.

"The big problem with Dmitri, the one we couldn't solve, was the controller – how can you give the illusion of something being real when the only way to interact with it is to press a button? It doesn't work. Even when I talk to you over e-mail or Messenger, you don't feel real to me, it's only my experiences of you that make that like a real conversation. We were never able to solve that, it never really worked."

Black and White's Creature was the first time the company attempted to emulate a 'mind', and has influenced almost everything the company has made since

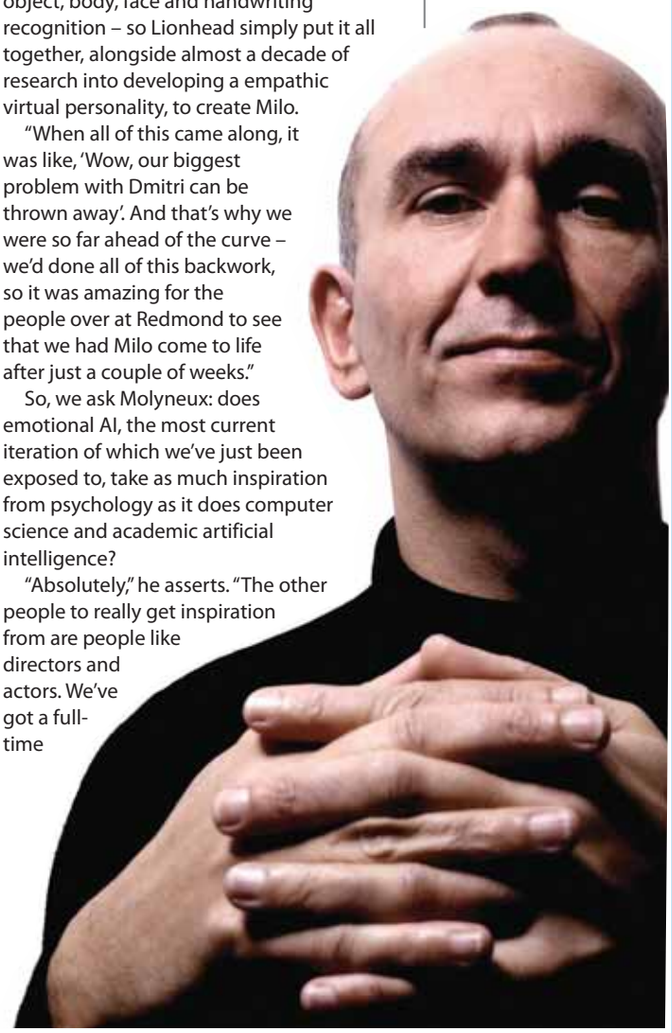
NATAL CLASSES

Until, of course, Redmond showed them what they were working on. But while the technology in Natal certainly brings a whole new range of possibilities to the table, it was what Lionhead discovered within the labs of Microsoft Research that really took that interface problem away. Given its wide remit as a modern technology company, Microsoft had already been doing work on voice recognition for Windows 7, as well as a whole raft of computer vision projects covering object, body, face and handwriting recognition – so Lionhead simply put it all together, alongside almost a decade of research into developing a empathic virtual personality, to create Milo.

"When all of this came along, it was like, 'Wow, our biggest problem with Dmitri can be thrown away'. And that's why we were so far ahead of the curve – we'd done all of this backwork, so it was amazing for the people over at Redmond to see that we had Milo come to life after just a couple of weeks."

So, we ask Molyneux: does emotional AI, the most current iteration of which we've just been exposed to, take as much inspiration from psychology as it does computer science and academic artificial intelligence?

"Absolutely," he asserts. "The other people to really get inspiration from are people like directors and actors. We've got a full-time



The villagers in Fable II exhibit behaviours on two different levels – individual reactions and also a 'group mind' that represents a community as a whole

director and a full-time scriptwriter working on Milo – they're here all of the time. So we ask them, 'Is the way Milo is acting, is his distance from the camera – is this taking emotion away or adding it?' I mean, ask yourself: why are there good actors and bad actors? Why does Meryl Streep consistently provide good performances while Madonna doesn't? There's a definable skill there: it's poise, it's body movement, it's blink rate. All of things communicate emotion."

> ***"The unsolvable problem with Dmitri was the controller – how can you give the impression of being real if the only way to interact with it is to press a button?"***

But there is a downside to being hung up on the details; on the little things that stand out – and Molyneux is not unaware of how this obsession with making a believable world can come at the expense of the game.

"People love the idea of emergence, and that is an important game mechanic to exploit. My criticism of us is that, at times, we've become too obsessed with it and have forgotten about the core of the game. I think you can probably see that in *Fable 1*, that we got a bit too obsessed with the simulation and forgot that it was a game that was fundamentally about being a hero."

Nevertheless, the exploitation of emotional AI as gameplay remains one of Lionhead's core ambitions – and, as such, we shouldn't really be that surprised that Milo is the latest thing to emerge from its secret corridors. And, just as every one of Lionhead's previous titles has shaped what comes next, the lessons learnt in making Milo a more believable character will have implications for making NPCs less robotic throughout the whole industry.

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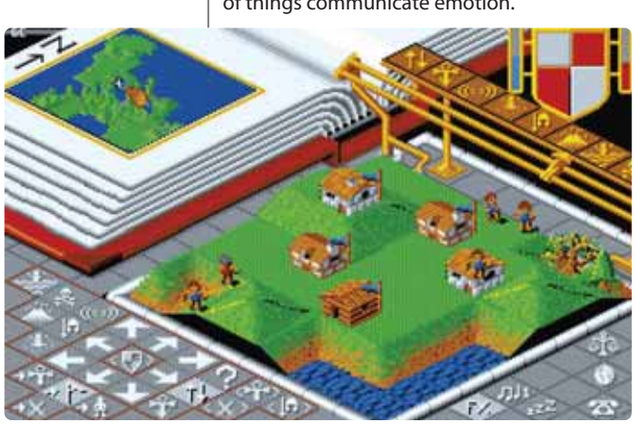

SMART BOMBS

IN THE PROCESS OF talking about Milo, Molyneux refers back to an old colleague of his – Demis Hassabis, the wunderkind who co-designed *Theme Park* and briefly worked at Lionhead before starting his own studio, Elixir, which closed in 2005. Although no longer working in the games industry, Hassabis has indirectly contributed to the birthing of Milo.

"Demis is actually now working in clinical research on how the human brain forms memories and how it approaches creativity. There was a project that I helped out on in 2007, which partially looks at whether it actually doesn't form memories in the way we thought it was; it's very constructive about it. We worked on it together – although I should point out that I only really did a bit of programming and helped with the brainstorming part – and then his team released this paper which is really well thought of.

"It was really useful to refer back to that for Milo: if you can begin to understand how to trigger these memories, that's really useful because part of the reason why Milo is so fascinating is that, as he gets to know you, he begins to remind you of things you've forgotten in your childhood."

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Giving a DAM

So we've heard about Lionhead's plans to build creative AI, but what about Microsoft's plans for everyone else? **Ben Board** of Xbox's new European developer account manager team explains what they can offer…

Left to right: Ben Board, Charlie Skilbeck, Allan Murphy

European game developers, something actually quite useful has happened: if your game will be released on Xbox 360 or Windows, you now have people in your time zone dedicated to you.

Team Xbox has added two new DAMs (Developer Account Managers) and a ninja engineer to its European HQ in Reading, UK. As one of those new DAMs I'd like to describe what we do and why that's good for you, to let you know we're here, and to give you a bit of personal background on the team.

HOT DAM

So what does a DAM do? We work closely with your game teams to find ways to achieve the cool stuff you're planning, using our knowledge of the hardware, software, features, technologies, processes, and new initiatives, even the MS address book.

If you have any other reason to want to contact Microsoft, your DAM is a great starting point. Perhaps you've been talking about building a website that can talk to the game, or you want to set up an online server for the title to store shared screenshots or replays; or you're thinking about your DLC strategy, perhaps using an in-game store, and you want to know whether it's worth the effort; or you think that your game will step on a TCR, and you'd like to talk about an exception. Or you want to use native Xbox features like Avatars, Live Party, or a certain cool new camera technology. Or perhaps you'd like an Xbox expert to look at the performance of your title, or to give advice on your code architecture, or to help you with your XLSP installation. This is what we do.

Let me introduce the new team. I'm Ben Board, and after joining Bullfrog/EA as a coder in 1997 eventually was a lead on *Fable* at Lionhead, established and ran the Guildford IGDA chapter, and spent three years as a producer in Australia before joining Microsoft. Charlie Skilbeck, my DAM colleague, has been involved with video games since about 1990, mostly as a programmer. He's worked for Codemasters, LucasArts and more recently EA Partners as their tech director. Ask him about his 256 byte *Tron* implementation and prepare to glaze over. Our third pillar is Allan Murphy, XDC engineering ace. Allan has worked in the game industry for over 16 years and on consoles since the early '90s, has shipped numerous titles and worked on a wide variety of engine technology, and has fixed more Load Hit Stores than I've had hot dinners. Between us we can offer nearly a half-century of game development experience.

While there's a lot we can do for you directly, much of our work is finding answers to questions or putting you in touch with the right person, and we work with a huge array of experts behind the scenes: the exceptional US DAM team; the AMs, who work with publishers on the business and commercial sides; the Release Managers, who work with publishers and developers to shepherd titles through submission; the marketing team, the Windows and DirectX teams, and not least XNA, to whom Allan reports. We have access to the definitive body of knowledge on Xbox development, in the form of whitepapers, Gamefest and GDC presentations, and a galaxy of subject matter stars who have supported their specialities for years, and often designed or developed the features themselves.

> ***"We're not so blinkered to ignore that you work on other platforms too – we know you take pride in the quality of all your SKUs, and we won't undermine that."***

Do you have something you'd like to talk about? If you don't know who your DAM is, the first step is to contact **eudam@microsoft.com**. We'll discuss your question over email or on the phone, and we may loop in a platform contact or two for their input. Depending on the issue we might arrange a conference call, or we might come to your office and talk about it in person. If needed, we can arrange meetings between you and relevant specialists at E3 or GDC.

Get us involved early. We do troubleshoot last-minute problems, but if you talk to your DAM about your title and its aspirations when it's in its early stages there's more we can do for you, and we have a better chance of avoiding drama at five to midnight. Include us in the planning phase, when you're aiming highest, and when we can help you estimate how much work some of these features will be. And get to know your DAM. Business is done between people, not companies, and when things get crispy (and they will) it can be very helpful to have someone at the platform that you can call on a Sunday night. And we buy a lot of lunches. The next one could be you.

If we're coming to see your studio or a new title for the first time, it's helpful if we can speak to people from all disciplines. The programmers may cut the code that runs on our hardware, but designers and artists make decisions based on platform capabilities, QA need to understand the TCRs and submission process, producers need to understand timelines and the cost of features, and studio heads need to make decisions that support the higher-level goals of a title or franchise. In my experience the most productive meetings occur when all facets of the project sit around a table, present their ideas, ask questions, get answers, and come to an understanding with me and each other about realistic options, and I take away a list of things to resolve.

X MARKS THE SPOT

That's what we are – now let me describe what we're not. We're not a replacement for the peerless Game Developer Support (**gameds@microsoft.com**). They remain the best target for your low-level API questions, but we suggest you CC your DAM so we're aware of your issues. We're not Microsoft Game Studios, so if you've got a game idea that shows off Xbox's unique capabilities you should pitch it to them.

We are a Microsoft resource for you, and we pride ourselves on our ability to keep your information confidential. We're not founts of all knowledge, so bear with us if we have to loop in the gurus. We don't make decisions about your game's content: we'll give you reasoned advice, but what you do with it is up to you. And we're not so blinkered to ignore that you work on other platforms too – yes, we want the Xbox version to be the best, but we know that you take pride in the quality of all your SKUs, and we won't give you advice that undermines that.

Starting next month, I'll be contributing a column to this fine periodical in which I'll talk about the big topics in our world and how your game might benefit from using them. For now, just know that you have a DAM, and he's ready, willing and able to help your game reach its potential. No charge.

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With smartphones and contextually aware gaming offering the mobile sector a new wind, Nokia gathered the industry's key figures to discuss what the future holds for wireless devices and the types of entertainment they can offer. **Will Freeman** pulled up a chair and listened in…

To those who adore it, the smartphone platform is an exalted gadget, industry saviour and technical marvel. Its apparent radiance often blinds the public and press alike, and subsequently it has been heralded as the exclusive redeemer of mobile gaming.

And yet there are a wealth of smartphones and operators sketching out a less monopolised plan for the future. As Apple charges off into the distance on a tangent of its own, the rest of the industry is beginning to come together, and take a long look at where mobile gaming needs to go, and what needs to be done to get there.

Two buzzwords currently dominate the dialogue of the industry's leading companies. The first is 'context aware gaming', and the other is of course 'social gaming'. These are the concepts on which mobile gaming has pinned its hopes, and as a result Nokia recently decided to gather together a number of key figures in the sector to separate the wheat from the hyperbole.

The usual garland of bottled water, coffee and biscuits adorns the centre of the expansive meeting table at Nokia's chosen venue, but those who surround the display are far from ordinary.

Along with the discussion's moderator, IMGA's Maarten Noyons, are Konami's head of mobile business development Florian Stronk, Digital Legends CEO and director general Xavier Carrillo Costa, FishLabs' technical director Marc Hehmeyer and Orange Games Services partnerships and services director Dan Keegan. They are joined by Ideaworks3D vice president of business development Julian Jones, Glu managing director for EMEA, Frank Keeling, and Nokia's director of games publishing Mark Ollila.

PUTTING THINGS IN CONTEXT

If you aren't familiar with context-aware gaming, you aren't alone. While anybody directly involved with mobile phones understands the term, there's still some way to go before its exact meaning is agreed upon. "I think we should ask for common ground in definition," suggests Konami's Stronk. "How do we define this from a usability perspective, and from a technology perspective?"

"When it comes to a definition of context aware gaming, it comes to looking at some sort of gaming experience that understands or interacts with the social context of where you are or what you're doing," adds Nokia's Ollila. "Be it that it takes into account the time, the weather, the location, the number of contacts you have in your handset, maybe your weight, your height, or even your sex or the amount of alcohol in your body."

Ollila's final detail is greeted with laughter, but the idea in general is something the panel take very seriously. A product that takes into account the context that the user is in, and uses that data to provide an actual gaming experience is seen by many as the way mobile games can reinstate their reputation. The first step towards that goal, the panel agrees, is an awareness of the new ways in which people understand gaming, mobile applications, and the ever-present shadow of social networking.

"We need to understand the phenomenon itself and what is actually happening and what we're seen over the past few years, and actually have a look at what direction we're going in and see how we in the industry can help facilitate those trends in terms of mobile gaming," says Ollila. "It's important for us to understand what's happening and what's available."

> ***"Ideas for games that use real world data seem to be hardwired into the psyche of those who are trying to sketch out the future of mobile games."***

"Also, we need to look at how social networking is going to merge with mobile gaming in the future," adds Glu's Keeling. "I'm interested in the kind of trends people are looking for and the direction they are going to go in. What are people going to use these services for and what are they using them for now? That's important."

The enthusiasm in the room is impossible to ignore, and at this point the panellists are itching to speak, as Keeling continues to elaborate: "Looking at it from another angle it's difficult to know if customers actually realise they are playing social games, as opposed to traditional games. It would be interesting to see if we could categorise it and if they saw it as a natural extension of the platforms."

There's a lot of hopes, a number of broad questions and a great deal of fervour and optimism, and again and again the age-old issue of merging of technologies is brought up. As games take a footing with the likes of Facebook, and as applications continue to woo consumers, the focus of the industry is still unclear.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

That is the very reason many of the people at Nokia's roundtable are here, and as they continue to pursue shared understanding, again the talk turns to definitions. Things have rapidly moved to gaming in a social networking context, and it's quickly apparent that while the leading mobile companies are not outpacing web-based social networking, the popularity of the concept is something of great interest to the sector.

"Socially networked gaming is something I see as defined by the ingrained competitiveness, and that's the appeal," says Orange's Keegan.

"Just the ability to be ranked, to see where all your friends and peer groups are in the ranking. That's such a compelling feature, and while it's only one feature of social gaming, it could be the most interesting aspect."

There's lengthy discussion of what Facebook has done to get it so right, and key words that it seems mobile developers should bear in mind are generally simple concepts: sharing, networking, rewarding users, communication. There's little doubt

Leading figures from Konami, Glu, Ideaworks3D, FishLabs, Orange and Digital Legends attended Nokia's Develop roundtable on the future of mobile games

that anybody considering the creation of a mobile game has to move way beyond traditional playability if they are to hope to capture the imagination of an increasingly savvy public, and it's clear there are also more complex matters to consider.

"On Facebook right now pretty much most of the games are asynchronous," points out Keeling. "In fact the big attraction is that you don't have to worry about someone being there. So perhaps competition is not the thing to focus on. But asynchrony gives games a competitive advantage."

"I think social games should generate systems of competition, cooperation, and actions and interaction," adds Ideaworks3D's Jones. "There are so many player communities all over the world on consoles and PCs, and they are all separating themselves from the outside world. People there are looking at their local lists and friends list before the global rankings."

As the conversation develops, Digital Legends' Costa is keen to discuss a broader issue, and one of utmost importance as mobile developers are forced to bear the burden of innovation more than most: "I think we need to understand that the very concept of what counts as a game is changing. We would not really consider the idea of, on Facebook, who has the most contacts as a game. I think with social gaming we need to look at something different from the traditional industry and redefine what could be the substance of a game."

"In terms of contextually aware gaming and applications, it is the next walled garden," adds Jones. "It's time to break down the boundaries between what is an application and what isn't. Education of the consumer is the barrier to progress of social gaming – education about adoption, and about how to use the technology. It's a group responsibility which involves operators, involves developers, and involves publishers."

ALL ECOSYSTEMS ARE GO

Jones' point is well taken, and suddenly talk turns to the mobile ecosystem that is the industry's Pandora's Box.

Issues such as the problems the numerous mobile formats cause developers are well documented, but there are more specific problems related to a stable platform including workable standardised monetisation that emerge as pressing issues.

"We also need to be very cautious because the technology opportunity is immense, but as Julian says, the immense effort to educate the customer as to how to use these services, not just at the beginning, but to maintain it and sustain it, is a massive marketing investment, and very few companies can do that," says Glu's Keeling. "If at this stage a young company is looking to what the new mobile technology and category is, maybe social gaming as a stable platform on a mass market basis is most prudent."

Showing where their professional hearts are, next the gathered executives come over a little creative, and several ideas are put forward for games that may be best suited. One thing that unites all of their suggestions is an emphasis on concepts with a practical function or real-world connection. A contextually aware dating system is greeted with the most nods, and typifies the kind of game that the experts seem to be willing to put their faith into.

Titles built around real world data are hardwired into the psyche of those sketching out the future of mobile games.

> ***"On Facebook most of the games are asynchronous. The big attraction is that you don't have to worry about someone being there to play with."***

"I think the future will be that even data more will be digitised, such as Google Maps and Street View, and every kind of data will be made available to gaming," reveals FishLabs' Hehmeyer. "Of course, the handsets will move on with various upgrades. You will have a device so everywhere you are connected with everyone, and there will be the possibility to connect every kind of data and get involved with your environment, and there will be no boundaries city-wise or even country-wise."

Meanwhile, Keeling has an observation from another angle, which takes things back to the troubled mobile ecosystem: "I think a change will come when, with these kinds of games, it's as easy to play and buy them as it is to make a phone call. Right now buying the game is a pretty horrendous experience.

Next, the focus turns to the importance of established brands in the marketplace.

Everybody agrees that customers don't talk about social networks and contextually aware games. Rather, the public refer to their Facebook accounts and MySpace profiles. Social networking brand successes are of course notoriously hard to predict, as are a number of other communication phenomena.

Texting was a huge sensation without any kind of ecosystem, but the successes often outshine myriad failures, which is a point that fascinates the panel.

"I think that's true about things that get picked up, but it's possible to stimulate it by giving information and giving interesting ideas," suggests moderator Noyons, before asking his participants to try and concentrate on the downsides of social gaming.

"To be negative about social gaming is really hard – it's just a great product," admits Keegan. In general, the group agree that distribution channels do need some work before the industry can take mutual benefit from the new forms of mobile gaming, which is an issue that the iPhone model has changed forever.

CHANGING THE CHANNEL

Just how open distribution channels should be is certainly a contentious issue, as Hehmeyer highlights: "You will have those small applications that get there. It's true that now, if you provide better access to the channels, you will have to compete against garage teams that can totally break a market in terms of pricing, which I would say is a threat and a strength."

The day ends with talk of the desktop computer disappearing all together, and people using their mobile in the future as much as they use their PC today. It's an ambitious dream, but one these industry leaders take very seriously. Furthermore, it's a process they hope will accelerate. They've come a long way to doing it to the landline phone, so why not the PC?

"The PC should be eliminated," concludes Hehmeyer with a smile. "When the PC is banished, everything you need will be in your pocket, and then everything you do with the PC nowadays will automatically come up in your pocket device."

If that vision becomes a reality, then mobile gaming will have done far more than salvaged its reputation. It will hold the world's attention, and completely change the games industry as we know it. After all the furore, maybe Apple's attempt with the iPhone is just the beginning.

Richard Jacques | Studios

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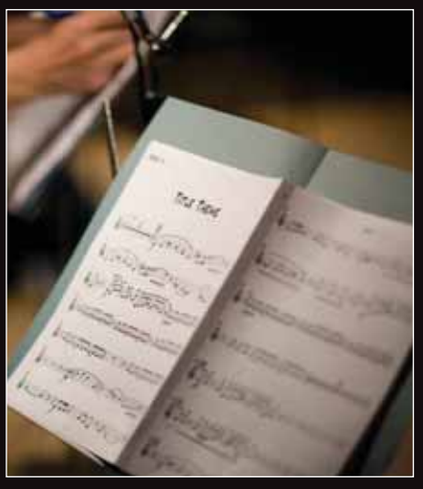
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Jeff Hickman, Executive Producer, Mythic Entertainment

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Kish Hirani, Head of Developer Services and Colin Hughes, Senior Principal Engineer,Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

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Jonathan Smith, Development Director, Travellers Tales

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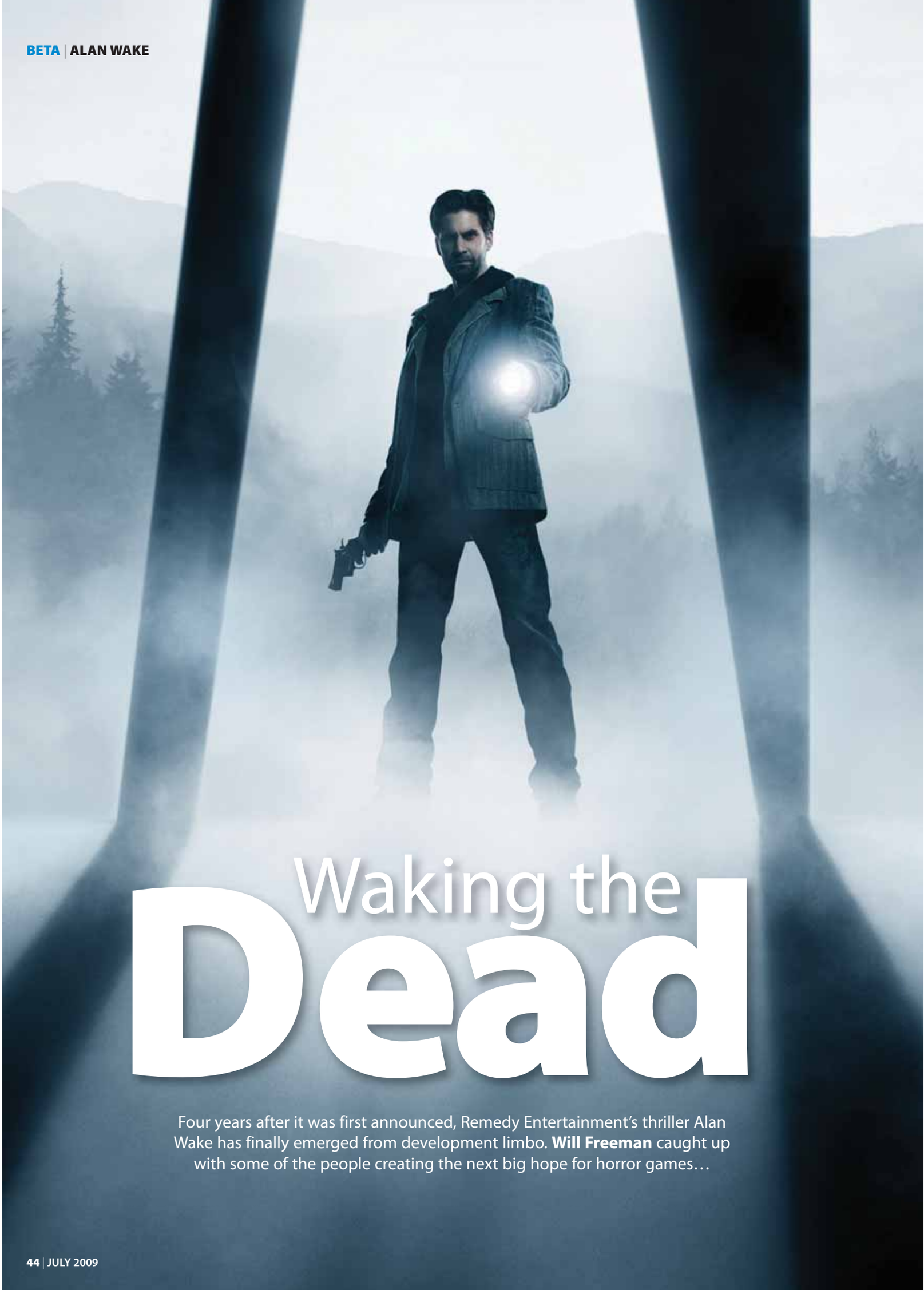

Waking the Dead

Four years after it was first announced, Remedy Entertainment's thriller Alan Wake has finally emerged from development limbo. **Will Freeman** caught up with some of the people creating the next big hope for horror games…

First revealed at E3 in 2005, Remedy Entertainment's *Alan Wake* has enjoyed an infamously long gestation period as its developer has toiled away at realising an ambitious project.

Both studio and game have been closely watched – at least, as closely as something so heavily guarded can be. As a Microsoft-exclusive (the game is being made for both the Xbox 360 and Vista) it has teased fanboys; it's protracted development time has meanwhile lead those working in the industry to speculate that the game could end up being one of the most expensive developed in Europe given its lengthy production cycle.

AN AWAKENING

But with a spring 2010 release date confirmed at E3 2009, rumours about the game's immenent abandonment have finally been put to sleep, and a wealth of slick screenshots have been unveiled.

Billed as a story-lead psychological action thriller, *Alan Wake* boasts some impressive tech, particularly in terms of motion capture. In February Espoo-based Remedy confirmed a partnership with Imagination Studios, formerly known as Northern Light Studios, which is revitalising the project with mo-cap and animation services.

Remedy's project follows the exploits of a best-selling suspense author suffering from writer's block, who escapes to a small town only to face the mysterious disappearance of his fiancée.

To find out more about the making of the game, *Develop* sat down with some of the Remedy team to find out more about a title that is still shrouded in mystery.

That meant speaking to several key figures at the company – namely the game's lead writer Sam Lake, Remedy development director Markus Mäki, lead technical artist Sami Vanhatalo, and Oskari Häkkinen, who has the rather interesting title of head of franchise development.

Alan Wake and its titular hero may have been devised by a Nordic team, but it aspires to capture small town Americana

How did you conceive the original idea for Alan Wake, and what were its inspirations?
Sam Lake: Right from the start we knew we wanted to have a modern day real world setting, but even with that base, we wanted to have gameplay options that would allow us to break the laws of reality in some way. By making it subjective, something that may or may not be true, as is the case in a psychological thriller, we managed to find a good balance between the two.

We were making an action game, but we didn't want an action hero as the main character, we wanted a capable everyman, someone flawed, but smart and likeable. We wanted to make a story-driven game, and we knew that we wanted to use narration as a story-telling tool. A writer – a professional storyteller – seemed like a prefect choice.

> ***"The ideas and discoveries made with the gameplay protoyping meant that the story was rewritten many times along the way."***

And finally, we wanted to use an idyllic all-American small town as our setting, something seen over and over again in movies and TV-series, such as *Twin Peaks*, but not so much in video games.

The role of narration as a story-telling tool comes up time and again with reference to Alan Wake – both in terms of its creation and story itself. Did the focus on narration require a different type of approach to production and design to that typical of an action game?
SL: We started out with the story, and worked our way to the gameplay and game world from there. Naturally the ideas and discoveries we made with the gameplay prototyping, and while building our technology and the game world, meant that the story had to be rewritten many times along the way, but the core concepts of the original story still remain.

How has the use of outsourcing complemented production?
Markus Mäki: Remedy is a reasonably small team, with just over 40 persons. Outsourcing is a key model for complementing the team and giving us more flexibility in pre-production schedules.

It also allows us to get more expertise, gather knowledge and work with talented people who know their focus area.

And that's why you took the outsourcing approach?
MM: Outsourcing some of our production is in our opinion the smart way to go. It has allowed our team to stay focused on the creative and technical aspects of the production process which are probably the most important drivers in making a cool game. We can also keep the work interesting and challenging for our team and concentrate on what we know best.

You have choose to work with new mo-cap techniques with Alan Wake. What exactly was the new mo-cap tech you implemented?
Sami Vanhatalo: We are constantly working to improve our processes, to take our games to the next level and to give the best possible experience to the gamer. Co-operating with Imagination Studios on facial motion capture to bring our characters to life is only the most recent example.

What other new technologies, internal or outsourced, have you used in Alan Wake?
MM: We have a wealth of cool, never seen before technology in our game. The lighting technology is obviously the most visible one, but I'm also proud of our landscape and vegetation. We also have screen-space ambient occlusion; I don't at least know of any shipped Xbox 360 title that has it. From the outsourced technologies I could mention a recent addition, Umbra Software's occlusion culling solution that has simplified our tech and has given us a nice performance boost.

Lighting serves a dual purpose for Remedy, not just as a tool for environmental effects, but also as a weapon during gameplay

Alan Wake has been in gestation for sometime – have you consciously had a longer production cycle?
Oskari Häkkinen: As a company Remedy aims to create intellectual properties that have unique concepts and entertain wide audiences. We feel that the Remedy brand is a seal of quality, and we want our followers to feel this too. We have always been driven by our own quality bar, not by timelines. Whereas this approach often takes on a longer development cycle we believe our concept serves the gamers as well as our company's internal high expectations.

Do you think that taking so long on creating Alan Wake makes consumers' expectations higher? Does that put any added pressure on you?
OH: We stepped into this project knowing that it would take a generous investment in time to get it right; creating a new concept that works and taking the time to mould ideas into something tangible always does. We believe that when the player gets their hands on *Alan Wake* they will see where we have put careful time and thought into every small detail to create that great gaming experience.

Now that you draw to the end of Alan Wake's creation, is this kind of extended development cycle a model you'd like to continue with in the future?
OH: We believe we have a quality bar to live up to, and we are only as good as our last project. We strive to improve and deliver innovative games with unique features – break barriers so to speak –and this takes time, but our end result should always speak for itself.

> ***"Outsourcing means we can keep the work interesting and challenging for our team while concentrating on what we know best."***

What has Microsoft been like to work with as a publisher? Has it been understanding in its support for the longer development time Alan Wake has taken?
OH: Microsoft has been very understanding of the development schedule and the vision for *Alan Wake* throughout the development. Both Microsoft and Remedy are committed to only the highest quality of games and that is something I hope gamers will notice when they play *Alan Wake*.

Rockstar Vancouver is now developing the third Max Payne game. How do you feel about an IP so integral to your studio history being developed by another studio? Are you involved at all?
OH: Honoured, in one word. The *Max Payne* franchise was a fantastic project which brought us a lot of joy and success, so to see it being kept alive is a living commendation of our work and to our achievements in our past projects.

Have you managed to benefit from financial aid from the likes of Tekes and other Finnish funding initiatives that assist game development and R&D in your country?
MM: Tekes has been a tremendous help to reduce the risks in our technology development and company development efforts. Tekes is a valuable support arm and one of the reasons why Finland is a great country for games development.

MIDLAND OF HOPE AND GLORY

As well as being the UK's geographical centre, the Midland's has long played its part at the core of the country's development community. Eager to learn about how developers in the region plan to maintain momentum in the industry, **Ed Fear** and **Will Freeman** sat down with some of the studio heads leading the charge…

What are the benefits for those establishing a development house in the Midlands, in a place so far removed from the country's biggest cities?

Simon Phillips: I think it's a double-edged sword really.

The obvious downside is not being in a big city, aside from being near Birmingham, so it's harder to attract the younger post-graduate talent who want to be in the hubbub of things and not in a field with cows in Bloxham.

But it is that which is the best thing about being around here; we have lots of rural environments like this where the more mature people in the games industry who want more of a chilled-out lifestyle can settle down and blend in with their family life.

From that point of view, then this area has a lot to offer that big cities don't. That's one of the key perks, so you get a lot of experienced staff up here.

Simon Prytherch: At the same time, large cities *are* very accessible from here, and we have some of the best universities in Oxford, and twenty minutes down the line we've got Warwick University up near Leamington. That's very good for recruitment as both of those areas are renowned centres: one for students and academia, and the other, Leamington, being great for development studios.

Phillips: Exactly. It's an hour from here to everywhere.

Paul Smith: It is a great place to live, and there's a lot of talent in the area. Where we are we've also got Derby, where there's a cluster of big game studios. If you're going to set up a new studio, you go to where the raw materials are. There's lots of people to tap into, and there's just great countryside. I used to work in London, and I don't miss it.

> ***"What we don't have in the Midlands is a regional organisational body for the industry like Game Republic or GameHorizon in the north."***

So the quiet nature of the region is definitely an asset that attracts more experienced talent?

Phillips: Absolutely. It's got that 'settle-down-appeal'. And also, because of that, you know that when somebody moves into the area

WHO'S WHO

Paul Smith
MD, Strawdog Studios
Focused on creating and nurturing its own IP, Strawdog was formed in 2003 and initially focused on contract work before stepping out on its own projects.

Simon Prytherch,
CEO, Lightning Fish
Banbury-based Lightning Fish specialises in family-orientated titles like its *NewU* fitness game.

Simon Phillips,
MD, Gusto Games
Formed in the wake of Silicon Dreams' demise, Gusto makes sports games for most formats.

Graeme Monk
MD, Eiconic
Focused on smaller projects for PC and console, Eiconic's latest release is the Gametrak-using *SqueeBall Party*.

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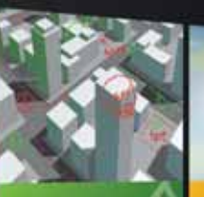

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From left to right: Graeme Monk, Paul Smith, Simon Phillips and Simon Prytherch

and settles down with their family they are in it for keeps. It's not a case of them working at a place they can get to on a tube, doing it for six months and seeing how it goes, before moving somewhere else.

Graeme Monk: The industry has got ten to fifteen years older too, which is something the area can take advantage of. We're all that much older, with families and various other things, so if you don't want to work in London, it's nice and chilled.

Prytherch: I find it an advantage for international recruiting as well, because this area offers a quintessential British image, and it's outside of London. So if people have come from a rural area or have had enough of city life, perhaps living in Paris or Helsinki, then they can come here and think 'this is exactly how I envisage England to be'.

> ***"This region easily has a headcount of developers greater than that in London. We've got around 2,000 just in areas like Leamington Spa and Oxford."***

Smith: And, it's funny, because I'm surprised by how many people who work in this area were actually born around here. Also, there are some universities offering some great courses that can retain a lot of people in the area, and some big studios like Eurocom and Rare down the road, that are attractive to people.

Prytherch: In fact, I was doing a quick mental count of all the people employed in the games industry in the Midlands and I'd probably say that we've got, in terms of head count, more than any other region – even London. I think we've easily got a headcount of over 2,000 just looking locally, going as far as the Leamington and Oxford areas.

So are the universities in the area something that makes recruiting high calibre employees easier?

Smith: We're finding that in Derby the university is very, very strong on programming, and there's a lot of great students coming through. In fact we take on three or four a year through placements, and some stick with us.

Phillips: Maybe it's a bit different with the arts side. There things are lagging slightly, with the very specific skills they need to learn, although they are beginning to catch up. Of course I can only speak for my area of the Midlands. In general though, we are very pleased with what we can see.

Prytherch: Also, on the programming side, both Oxford and Warwick University have got some of the best computer science courses, but that means it is very hard to compete against all the other industries to get those graduates. We've found that by working with the universities we are getting some more of those now – not necessarily people just finishing their degree courses, but those doing research and masters and PhDs are easy to make contact with here, and we're interested in some of their research.

Monk: I think there should be more initiatives here like Dare to be Digital as well. When you've got students actually starting to work together as a team on a particular project, and they actually deliver something at the end of it, it's a really good platform for people trying to get into the industry. I've employed three or four people who have been involved with Dare to be Digital, and you can actually see the kind of quality of gameplay that they can put together. Again, there needs to be more of those kinds of things here.

Do you feel staff sharing schemes have a place in bringing together the Midlands developer community?

Smith: Just the phrase 'staff sharing' scares the living daylights out of me.

Prytherch: But put it another way, as 'collaboration'. I think collaboration is really important for smaller developers to grow. If you want to move up a level there are ways of doing that by working with other people who might have different skills to you.

What we don't have in the Midlands, which I think is a shame, is an organisational body for the industry in the region. That's partly due to there being no Government funding for the Midlands area, or very little. You get things like Game Republic, or GameHorizon in the north, but nothing here. That's something I definitely want to change.

Smith: It just hasn't happened in the Midlands yet. Whether it will or not I don't know, but because we're so dispersed, and the Midlands is such a huge area, it's difficult to define where it begins and ends.

Phillips: If we're sat here wondering why one hasn't been set up perhaps that's something we should all talk about. The thing is, with collaboration, it needs to be very well communicated and very well set up to work efficiently, because somebody always has an edge or angle.

Monk: There's got to be a lot of trust between the different studios as well, because one of the biggest things is confidentiality between projects. If you're going to outsource to somebody else, you want to be careful about what they've got in development in-house. Ideas get shared, and quite often ideas get nicked as well.

Prytherch: And you probably have to go to certain people because they are specialists in that area, and therefore are going to be doing something similar to you. So I think it is a case of having it legally defined and keeping things separate. I'm on the advisory board for GameHorizon, and I've seen how it works in that region. I'd say that the biggest advantage of that organisation is the networking and collaboration. And that's for all studios – not just the small ones. For example, Eutechnyx get the smaller studios to help them on some of their larger projects, giving those studios the experience to get to the next level.

Smith: There needs to be something in this region to be honest.

Monk: When I was working down in Oxford, a lot of the Oxford developers would get together and just chat about things, and it was a really good forum to discuss problems that you were having with projects, or a particular approach you were taking to a project. I think that is potentially what's missing from the Midlands. It is almost as if we need a Tiga Midlands chapter, which would benefit us all.

GUSTO GAMES

STATS

Number of staff: 50

Year founded: 2003

Location: Banbury

Key staff:
Simon Phillips (Managing Director)
Steve Archer (Development Director)
Andrew Hersee (Technical Director)

Previous projects:
Urban Freestyle Soccer, Console versions of Eidos' *Championship Manager* franchise, *Pro Stroke Golf*, *uTour Golf*, *Golf.com Pro Challenge*, *Ultimate ISPY*, *Goosebumps: Horrorland*

Currently working on:
The official *Ashes Cricket* game on Wii (due out this summer) from Codemasters, plus a number of as yet unannounced titles (both sports and non-sports based)

STEPPING OUT of the ashes of Silicon Dreams in 2003, it's been a rapid jounrey for Gusto to get where it is today. Set up by a bunch of friends, Gusto's remit was to stay within the sports sector and capitalise on the experience they'd gained – and the technology they'd developed – at Silicon Dreams.

And remain along those lines it did, getting its first gig on *Urban FreeStyle Soccer* – unusually cross-platform for a brand new studio, thanks to that aforementioned technology obtained from its predecessor, which still forms the base of Gusto's cross-platform engine to this day. The studio's big break came next, however, in the form of Eidos' *Championship Manager*.

"We were tasked with developing the game for all console formats," says managing director Simon Phillips. "It was an incredible challenge and one we are still proud of – the PSP version is still a favourite game."

The studio has at least two main game teams in order to ramp up and down smoothly on products, as well as separate technical, production and concept/design teams. The set-up is deliberately flat, says Phillips, in order to "encourage all to come forward with new ideas or ways of doing things."

"The individuals here all feel as though they contribute to making a success of the studio."

The studio's long-standing tech base has been updated and optimised throughout its 12 years to add in new platforms as they are launched, which Phillips says has come in handy as the company prepares to enter the field of social gaming.

"As we start moving into more social spaces of gaming, where the platform you use becomes less important than the experience, having this wide-ranging technology makes life easier to create games where you can log in from your iPhone, PC or PS3 and have similar experiences and social elements.

"Also, the fact that it's gone through so many product cycles is really important – it gives us great reliability during submission processes, which is something you can't really put a price on when working on licensed products that are tied in to real-world events."

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STRAWDOG

STATS

Number of staff: 12

Year founded: 2003

Location: Derby

Key staff:
Paul Smith(Managing Director)
Simon Morris (Technical Director)
Derek Pettigrew (Development Director)
Dan Marchant (Business Development Director)

Previous projects:
Geon (XBLA,PSN,Wii), *Turbo Duck* (iPhone) and numerous work-for-hire projects

Currently working on:
Latest XBLA game *Space Ark* due for release end of Q3 2009

IF YOU'RE thinking, 'Hey, I already know about these guys,' you probably do – *Develop* ran an in-depth profile on Derby's digital darlings in our March issue. But, to save you rooting through your back issues (we know you have them), here's a quick recap: six years ago, a group of people working at different studios in the UK felt a twinge to go it alone. Several pub conversations, emails and forum posts later, Strawdog Studios was born.

Originally working largely on contract work, it invested the profits from this into building its own original prototypes. A strong Game Connection showing lead to its first original project, *Geon*, being signed by Eidos, which originally launched on Xbox Live Arcade before being ported to PSP, PSN, iPhone and Wii. Since then it's been working on *Space Ark*, another digital-download title set for release in Q3 this year, plus spending spare moments on iPhone game *Turbo Duck* which it released a few months ago.

Despite being such a small studio, the team always makes sure it has a small team constantly working on designs and ideas for new IP, in addition to the main project of the studio, while the technical director maintains the studio's proprietary cross-platform tech.

The studio is committed to keeping control of its IP and building a business with long term value, says managing director Paul Smith.

"We have invested capital in several of our own original game projects and brought on board other investors who are not linked to the games industry," he explains. "We've worked very closely with EM Media who are well known for successfully supporting UK regional film, and have now co-funded two of our game projects plus several others in the region through their European regional development funding."

The funds, and the attached stipulation that the IP must remain in the region, has helped the studio when negotiating contracts. "It's allowed us to licence various versions of our games to different publishers for publication across a wide spread of platforms. For an independent developer it is vital to get your IP onto as many platforms as possible to maximise revenue."

In the long term, Strawdog aims to become a digital publisher, utilising a business model that's "revenue based and less dependent on third-party funding," says Smith – starting with this year's *Space Ark*, which will be the first time Strawdog has taken the dual roles of publisher and developer.

CONTACT

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EICONIC

STATS

Number of staff: 5, plus contract staff

Year founded: 2006

Location: Various, distributed development around the Midlands, but primarily based in High Wycombe.

Key staff:
Graeme Monk (MD/Executive Producer)
Dave Pollard (Lead Games Programmer)
James Boulton (Technical Director)
Neall Jones (Creative Producer)
Simon Credland (Art Director)

Previous projects:
SqueeBalls (Oct 2009), *Polar Panic* (Sept 2009)

Currently working on:
TBA

EICONIC IS one of the growing group of distributed developers, having no fixed abode but all collaborating remotely. Its founders came from the Oxford studio of LEGO iterators Traveller's Tales. After working on *Crash: Twinsanity* and *Super Monkey Ball Adventures*, they left in 2006 to start Eiconic.

Since then, the team has been working with Performance Designed Productions producing *SqueeBalls* for its Xbox 360 Freedom motion controller, which was recently announced at E3. It's also hard at work on an Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network title *Polar Panic* on off-moments. The studio aims to release the latter this year.

"We're a core team of dedicated professionals who concentrate on small to medium projects," explains managing director Graeme Monk. "We much prefer the shorter turn-around of projects lasting up to 12 months."

What really separates Eiconic is the 'virtual studio' approach, however. Staff work from home, using established communication software like Skype and Google Talk – and its proprietary technology Moai has been specifically designed to work on a remote server.

"It was necessary that all of our tools, assets and production pipeline could work remotely and from anywhere in the world," explains Monk. "Every member of staff works on live data and the latest code, and clients have access to the same data and pipeline. If we want feedback on an issue, asset or gameplay mechanic we can inform the client, who can update and build the data on their end in less than ten minutes."

The system works well for the team, who still meet up every few weeks but can have Scrum production meetings daily. They also try to keep to standard working day hours, but can be flexible – and this, coupled with the lack of stress that comes from no commute, makes production "very relaxed, and increases the creativity that we have," says Monk.

In fact, they're so confident with the distributed model that they think other studios will follow suit in time: "We firmly believe that distributed development will become more and more commonplace over the next few years. When we set up with this philosophy, people said that we were mad, and that we wouldn't survive. We're now in a position where we've proven that it works and that our philosophy is sound – we're still alive and kicking, and looking to expand."

CONTACT

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LIGHTNING FISH GAMES

STATS

Number of staff: 12

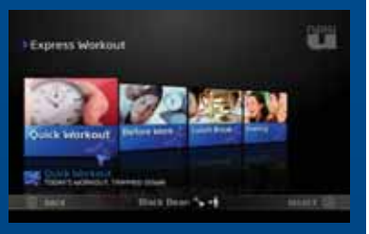
Year founded: 2008

Location: Banbury

Key staff:
Simon Prytherch (CEO)
Mike Montgomery (Development Director)
David Hunt (Chief Technology Officer)
Phil Marley (Creative Director)
Nicola Salmoria (Senior Programmer)

Previous projects:
N/A

Currently working on:
NewU Fitness First Personal Trainer, further *NewU* products, plus unannounced title



LIGHTNING FISH is the youngest of all the developers featured here, having been set up only last year – but the firm is already set to release its first retail product this September, the fitness title *NewU Fitness First Personal Trainer*.

Set up by industry veterans Simon Prytherch, Mike Montgomery and David Hunt – who have more than 60 years of experience between them – Lightning Fish is targeting a different type of gamer than the traditional core user: families, and specifically the growing number of people using game consoles as fitness devices. Shortly after its inception it signed a deal with Black Bean to develop *NewU*, for which it worked closely with fitness chain Fitness First and (non-)Dr. Gillian McKeith's 'You Are What You Eat' company, to ensure the game had a solid fitness and nutritional grounding.

"Our studio mission is to develop family-oriented games that have a positive effect on your life through social interaction," says founder Simon Prytherch.

"When designing games we consider the consumer first. This means we often come up with novel approaches that are not always the acknowledged approach. For example, *NewU* is gathering attention because we decided to feature real video-based characters rather than computer generated avatars: the audience for fitness titles is much more comfortable with a real person, and this is proving to break down barriers."

To this end, Lightning Fish has its own studio for video shooting, which it intends to leverage for all of its future titles. "Our proprietary technology is in the areas of motion tracking and video/graphic integration," says Prytherch. "It enables us to achieve excellent motion tracking and custom video editing. This was initially all developed for the Wii, but we are now developing versions for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC."

Lightning Fish believes in the power of small teams – which will always be ten members or less, says Prytherch – because it believes it to be the most efficient way of developing games. "It also means that every team member knows each other, and everyone has a say in the direction and design of the products," he explains. And while there may only be one product team at the moment, it is currently staffing up for a second team, and is poised to announce further family titles in the next few months.

CONTACT

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HIGH SCORE PRODUCTIONS

STATS

Number of staff: 3

Year founded: 2004

Location: Oxfordshire

Key staff:
Hugh Edwards (Director)

Previous projects:
Beijing 2008 Olympics, Fallout 3, IL2 Sturmovik: Birds Of Prey, LEGO Batman, Ultimate ISPY

Currently working on:
Unannounced titles for Eidos and Blitz

HIGH SCORE Productions is an audio-outsourcing company based in Banbury, Oxfordshire that specialises in creating music, sound-design, voiceover and localised audio specifically for games. High Score has a permanent team of three and several regular contractors across their two studios.

High Score has worked for many large UK, European and American publishers and developers, including Eidos, Sega, EA, Activision, Rebellion, Oxygen, Blitz Games and 505 Games to name but a few – and believes that it always leaves a client satisfied.

Since the outfit's conception in 2004, the team has worked on over 70 game titles across all platforms such as PC, console, handheld and mobile, having originally worked in the television and film arena.

"We've been fortunate enough to have worked on some fabulous titles over the past few years and have a very large, ever-growing professional client-base," says director Hugh Edwards.

"Once we gain new clients, they always come back to us, I think because of our attention to detail and the fact that we really do care. It's all about making the best game possible for the audience and like it or not, audio is easily 30 per cent of the gamer's experience. Graphics sell games – graphics, gameplay and audio make the player come back again and again."

Edwards believes that the studio's location makes it very cost-effective when compared to the traditional Soho outfit, and that this is more important now than ever before.

"One of the things that we've always scratched our heads about is why people traditionally think that you need to be in Soho to be able to produce great quality audio for games," he claims.

"It's all about the talent in your people and all our guys are spot-on. Since the credit crunch came about people have been very pleasantly surprised to see that we're just naturally more commercially viable than a lot of our larger competitors, simply because of our location. The days of large London audio studios are coming to an end – it's just not necessary."

"If we need to record in London, we record in London. If we need to record in LA, we record in LA. We have the best of both worlds, our audio is of the utmost quality, and our costing model is transparent and realistic."

CONTACT

High Score Productions
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IMPROMPTU SOFTWARE

STATS

Number of staff: 5

Year founded: Registered 1999, started business 2006

Location: South Derbyshire

Key staff: Nigel James Brown (Managing Director and Technical Audio Consultant)

Previous projects:
Virtua Tennis 2009, GTI Club+, Sega Superstars, B-Boy, Flat Out Head On

Currently working on:
Three projects across all major handheld and console platforms

FIRST REGISTERED as a company in 1999, Nigel James Brown's Impromptu Software was initially formed to function as a vehicle for the promotion of the i2MS cross-platform interactive music system.

Soon after the studio's conception, Brown went on to work for both Core and Microprose, before a period freelancing while he developed a new interactive audio system by the name of iSAudio. As a result Impromptu lay relatively dormant until 2006, which saw the company become an entity in its own right, offering the iSAudio tech to developers looking for a cross-platform sound solution.

"Our mission is to be innovative with audio and try and push the limits of each console's audio hardware to achieve the best cross-platform solution available," reveals Brown. "We believe passionately that audio should be planned and integrated within the game from day one – not just an afterthought. We believe in building partnerships with external audio outsource talent that we can call upon for specific game requirements."

Currently working on three projects across all the major console and handheld platforms, Impromptu is focused on constantly developing its technology to integrate with emerging formats. The emphasis on evolving iSAudio means working directly on projects, adding support for the tech's tools into the game developer's export pipeline. Impromptu also assists with the sourcing and implementation of sound, and has started to supply iSAudio as a middleware solution for cross-platform development overseas.

"We are currently like no other audio middleware company because we will work directly with the projects that we get involved with," says Brown. "We also bring a complete solution for cross-platform audio support that can be tailored to suit many game genres. We should really be called 'The Entire Audio Department for Hire' because that's how many of our clients view us."

Looking to the future, Impromptu is looking to further its course down the route for licensing its middleware solution, while continuing to expand the portfolio of games on which it has worked.

"We're very pleased to be a part of the many titles we've worked on over the years," enthuses Brown. "It's really nice to be part of a team that has been nominated or won awards. *Sega Superstars Tennis* was nominated for a *Develop* award in 2008, and *B-Boy* won a *Develop* award for Audio Accomplishment and was also nominated for a BAFTA."

CONTACT

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Sun, sea and... ...seminars

The Develop Conference and Expo returns this month. We offer you a handy guide to the event…

On July 14th, UK coastal city Brighton will once again welcome over 1,000 developers and games execs to attend the Develop Conference and Expo.

It's the fourth outing for the event, which continues to go from strength to strength each year.

The conference is split into three parts: the main two-day conference which runs on July 15th and 16th, the expo, and then the two one-day conferences that run before them on July 14th.

The first of these two is for games education. The second is an engrossing new addition to the schedule called Evolve, which looks at the new emerging markets for games developers; namely areas like digital distribution, social games, mobile and online.

Over the next four pages we've pulled together all the info about them, including timings and speaker details for each session, plus a guide to the expo. Head to **www.developconference.com** for more details. See you there.

KEYNOTES

MAIN KEYNOTE:
GTA creator and Realtime Worlds' Dave Jones talks about the opportunities available to developers via online

TRACK KEYNOTES:
ART: The Art of LittleBigPlanet – A Big Medley (*Kareem Ettouney and Mark Healey Co-Founders, Media Molecule*)
AUDIO: The Runtime Studio in Your Console: The Inevitable Directionality of Game Audio (*Guy Whitmore, Director of Audio, Microsoft Game Studios*)
BUSINESS: Out of the Box(ed Product): Thinking for an Online Age (*Jeff Hickman, Executive Producer, Mythic Entertainment*)
CODING: PlayStation: Cutting Edge Techniques (*Kish Hirani and Colin Hughes, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe*)
DESIGN: Building LEGO Worlds – online, offline, and everything in between (*Jonathan Smith, Development Director, Traveller's Tales*)
EVOLVE #1: Resetting the Game (*David Perry, Creative Director of Acclaim Games*)
EVOLVE #2: The Long Tail and Games: How digital distribution changes everything. Maybe (*David Edery, Principal of Fuzbi*)
MOBILE: Moving games to a new beat: The development of Nokia's Dance Fabulous (*Mark Ollila, Director of Technology & Strategy and Head, Nokia*)
PRODUCTION: Bridging the Gap: Experiences Learned with Agile Project Management (*Lisa Charman, Associate Producer, Ubisoft and Patric Palm, CEO and Co-Founder, Hansoft*)

Tuesday 14th July: One-day conferences

Evolve

develop evolve

10:00 - 10:45	**KEYNOTE:** Resetting the Game *David Perry, Creative Director, Acclaim Games*		
10:45 - 11:00	**Coffee Break**		
11:00 - 11:45	**MOBILE KEYNOTE:** Moving games to a new beat: The development of Nokia's Dance Fabulous *Mark Ollila, Director of X-Media Solutions, Nokia*	**Whose Quiz is it Anyway?** Bringing User-Generated Content to the Buzz! Franchise *Caspar Field, Senior Producer, Relentless Software*	Browser Based Games The Past, the Present, the Future *Jonathan Lindsay, Game Designer, Splitscreen Studios*
11:45 - 12:30	20 Great Innovations in Casual, Social and Mobile Games That You Should Steal *Stuart Dredge, Pocket Gamer*	10 Things Nobody Tells You About Digital Distribution and Self-Publishing That You Must Understand to Succeed *Martyn Brown, Co-Founder, Team 17*	The European Free to Play Market *Thomas Bidaux, ICO Partners*
12:30 - 13:30	**Lunch**		
13:30 - 14:15	How Today's Social Networks Will Change How You Make, Play and Sell Games Tomorrow *Kristian Segerstrale, Playfish*	**Panel:** Crossing Over in a World Gone Casual *Matt Spall, Founder, Playora; Magnus Alm, CEO, Muskedunder Interactive; Niall Fraser, Co-Founder, Tin Raven; Nils-Honger Henning, CCO, Bigpoint GmbH*	**The Xbox LIVE Indie Games Platform:** Community Games for Fun and Profit *Charlie Skilbeck, Developer Account Manager, Microsoft*
14:15 - 15:00	**A Game is a Game is a Game** *Dave Thomson, Number One Fan, Denki*	**Panel:** Opportunities and Hurdles for Mobile Gaming *John Chasey, President, Finblade; Tim Closs, CTO, Ideaworks 3D; Tim Green, Editor, Mobile Entertainment*	**Infectious:** How Viral Games Capture an Audience of Millions *Jeff Coghlan, Founder and Creative Director, Matmi*
14:45 - 15:30	**Coffee Break**		
15:30 - 16:15	**Panel:** The Fight For Playtime: What Do Social Networking Sites Have To Offer The Games Industry? *Tom Armitage, Writer, Schulze & Webb; Limvirak Chea, Android Market and OpenSocial Leader, Google; Chris Thorpe, Founder, Jaggeree*	**Case Study:** A Browser-Based MMORPG on Every Desktop *Jim McNiven, Kerb*	Launch Your Game Across Multiple Mobile and Social Platforms Without Killing Your Team *Chris White, Studio Head, Glu Mobile*
16:15 - 17:00	**Panel:** After the iPhone Honeymoon:Where Next for Apple's Mobile? *James Brooksby, Studio Head, doublesix; Chris Byatte, Director, Chillingo; Paul Farley, Managing Director, Tag Games, Michael Schade, CEO, Fishlabs; Alan Yu, VP, ngmoco*	How Social Networks and Emerging Platforms and Technologies Will Re-shape Gaming's Oldest Genre *Struan Robertson, Producer, Gusto Games*	Practical Applications of Online Convergence *Paul Croft, Co-Founder, Mediatonic*
17:00 - 17:15	**Break**		
17:15 - 18:00	**KEYNOTE:** The Long Tail and Games: How Digital Distribution Changes Everything. Maybe. *David Edery, Principal, Fuzbi*		

Games:Edu

09:30 - 09:45 Introduction and Welcome
David Hayward, Pixel-Lab

09:45 - 10:15 KEYNOTE: Building Institutional Relationships
Richard Wilson, TIGA

10:15 - 10:45 KEYNOTE: Channel 4 Education and Indie Games *Alice Taylor, Channel 4*

10:45 - 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 - 11:30 Oh The Cowman and Farmer Should be Friends
Dr Mike Reddy, Head of Interactive Technology, Newport Business School, University of Wales

11.30 - 12.00 Blitz Open Days
Kim Blake, Blitz Game Studios

12:00 - 12:30 Academic Partnerships with SCEE
Sarah Lemarie, SCEE

12:30 - 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 13:40 Skillset Sessions - Introduction

13:40 - 14:00 The Global Game Jam

14:00 - 14:20 Centre of Excellence for Games, Abertay
Gregor White, University of Abertay

14:40 - 15:00 X48 *Andrew Sithers, Microsoft*

15:00 - 15:20 Games Fleadh *Phil Bourke, Tipperary Institute*

15:20 onwards Roundtable Discussions

GAMES/EDU/09

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Wednesday July 15th: Conference

09.00 - 09.30	Registration						
09.30 - 10.30	Keynote Dave Jones, Creative Director, Realtime Worlds						
10.30 - 11.00	Break						
11.00 - 12.00	**User Generated Content – The Legal Consequences** *Tahir Basheer, Partner, Sheridans*	**flOw and Flower: Games and Art** *Jenova Chen, Creative Director and Co-Founder, thatgamecompany*	**Growing Your Business (Panel discussion)** *Thomas Bidaux (ICO Partners), James Brooksby (Doublesix) Charles Cecil (Revolution), and Paul Farley (Tag Games)*	**Preparing for Larrabee** *Dr Doug Binks (Senior Application Engineer, Intel) & Josh Doss (Intel)*	**PlayStation Home – First Term Report** *Peter Edward, Home Platform Director, SCEE*	**Are You Really Going to Retire as a Game Developer?** *Ed Daly, General Manager, Zoe Mode*	**Never Mind the Boxes: Games as a Service** *Tom Armitage, Writer, Schulze & Webb*
12.00 - 13.30	Lunch						
13.30 - 14.30	**Open Software for Closed Hardware** *Steven Goodwin, SGX Engine*	**BUSINESS KEYNOTE: Out of the Box(ed Product)** *Jeff Hickman, EA Mythic*	**Race Script: An Alternative to Rubber Banding** *Eduardo Jimenez Chapresto, AI Programmer, Disney*	**Usability Testing for Videogames** *Jason Avent, Game Director, Black Rock & Graham McAllister, Director of Vertical Slice, Sussex University*	**Avatarrific: Putting a Face on the 360** *Stephen Mcfarlane, Art Director, Rare & Louise Ridgeway, Head of Animation, Rare*	**DESIGNER MASH-UP: David Braben and Dave Jones play Elite and GTA**	**Development Opportunities for PlayStation Home** *Liam Wickham, Support Manager, SCEE*
14.30 - 15.00	Break						
15.00 - 16.00	**Community Chest: 10 Useful Things We Learned From the SingStar Community** *Dave Ranyard, SCEE*	**Is Digital Distribution the Saviour of PC?** *Charlie Barrett (Kalypso), Dorian Bloch (Chart Track/GfK), Rich Keen (Direct2Drive), Mark Morris (Introversion), David Nottingham (LucasArts)*	**Architecture and Games** *Viktor Antonov (The Building) Rory Olcayto (The Architects' Journal), Rob Watkins (Lionhead Studios) & Alex Wiltshire (Edge)*	**PRODUCTION KEYNOTE: Agile Project Management** *Lisa Charman (Ubisoft) & Patric Palm (Hansoft)*	**Crossing Over: Working With Other Industries** *Alex Amstel (Tuna), Jamie Campbell (Juice Games), Margaret Robertson (Consultant), Adam Russell (Lecturer/Independent Game Maker)*	**Evolving the Racing Franchise** *Chris Pickford (Associate Producer, Bizarre Creations) & Ben Ward (Studio Communications Manager, Bizarre)*	**Lua Scripting Interactive Behaviour for PlayStation Home**
16.00 - 16.30	Break						
16.30 - 17.30	**PANEL: From Light Bulb to Console: The Writing Process** *Sini Downing (Sidelines), James Swallow (Writer), Justin Villiers (Writer) & Andy Walsh (Writer)*	**ART KEYNOTE: The Art of LittleBigPlanet** *Kareem Ettouney (Art Director and Co-Founder, Media Molecule) & Mark Healey, (Co-Founder, Media Molecule)*	**The Life Cycle of The Bonsai Barber for WiiWare** *Martin Hollis, Founder, Zoonami*	**Driving 3D TVs Using Current Generation Consoles** *Aaron Allport (R&D Manager, Blitz Games Studios) & Andrew Oliver (CTO, Blitz Games Studios)*	**What the Music Industry Can Reveal About Digital Distribution** *Simon Watt, Vice President, Technology, Universal Music Group*	**Tom Clancy's EndWar: An After Action Report** *Michael De Plater, Creative Director, Ubisoft*	
Evening	Develop Industry Excellence Awards						

DEVELOP INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS: July 15th

Now in its seventh year, the Develop Industry Excellence Awards is the only event which rewards the work done by Europe's leading development companies. This year, over 70 companies from across the continent are contesting for 18 awards that recognise every facet of making games.

Details on the finalists can be found online at **developmag.com/develop-awards**.

The 2009 ceremony will be held at the Hilton Metropole, Brighton on Wednesday July 15th – over 500 games industry execs are expected to attend.

To attend, contact Jodie.Holdway@bhpr.co.uk or call +44 (0)1462 456 780 – hurry, tickets and tables are quickly selling out.

TRACKS KEY

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Thursday July 16th: Conference

09.00 - 09.30	**Registration**				
09.30 - 10.30	**Panel: Tip Top Technology in Trying Times: How Do Studios Keep Up-to-Date in a Credit Crunch?**	**Art Directing Customisable Characters for International Markets** *Jimmy O'Ready, Character Art Team Lead, Realtime Worlds*	**Management for Evil Geniuses** *Imre Jele, Project Director, Volatile Games*	**The Wizards of OS: I Don't Think We're in C++ Anymore** *David Hawe (Eutechnyx) & Doug Wolff (Eutechnyx)*	**DESIGNER MASH-UP: Masaya Matsuura and Jenova Chen play PaRappa the Rapper and Flower**
10.30 - 11.00	**Coffee Break**				
11.00 - 12.00	**3 Shades of Racing – Building Environments for Blur** *Beverley Bright (Art Manager, Bizarre Creations) & Ben Ward, (Bizarre Creations)*	**Video Games as The Eighth Art** *Denis Dyack, Founder, Silicon Knights*	**Panel: Online Games, Virtual Worlds and MMOs: Raising Money and Making Money**	**CODING KEYNOTE: PLAYSTATION: Cutting Edge Techniques**	**Public Service Gaming: Public Value First, Commercial Value Second** *Alice Taylor, Commissioning Editor, Education, Channel 4*
12.00 - 13.00	**Lunch and One Life Left**				
13.00 - 14.00	**Introduction to Human IK Middleware** *Andrew Ostler, Autodesk*	**DESIGN KEYNOTE: Building LEGO Worlds** *Jonathan Smith, Travellers Tales*	**Text; Voice Over; Multiple SKUs: How a AAA localisation producer's nightmare can turn to be living a dream!** *Tristan Lefranc, Creative Assembly*	**Games, Designs and Lessons Learned at Global Game Jam** *Susan Gold (Full Sail/Game Program) & Gorm Lai (Programmer)*	**SESSION TBC**
14.00 - 14.30	**Break**				
14.30 - 15.30	**Using Git to Tame a Herd of Cats** *Lee Hammerton (Network Lead, Crytek UK) & Jake Turner (Software Development Manager, Crytek UK)*	**It's Time for Music Games 2.0** *Masaya Matsuura, President, NanaOn-Sha*	**How to Communicate with Artists** *Arran Green, Senior Video Designer, SCEE*	**Ship Your Game On Time, On Budget: Seven Highly Effective Practices** *Robert Walsh, CEO and Co-Founder, Krome Studios*	**Making Videogames History: Starting the National Videogames Archive**
15.30 - 16.00	**Coffee Break**				
16.00 - 17.00	**"Diagetic Media" – Beyond First-Person Shooters** *Ana Kronschnabl, CEO, FluffyLogic*	**Understanding the Gaming Audience Landscape** *Edward Hunter, comScore*	**Gamesification: Turning Other Things into Games** *Maurice Suckling, Writer, The Mustard Corporation*	**The Evolution of Fable's Challenging Hero** *Ian Faichnie, (Character & Creature Art Manager, Lionhead) & Si Jaques, Lead Artist (Lionhead)*	**Managing Asset Heavy Game Production: Quality Video, Graphics, Audio and Text** *Simon Prytherch, CEO, Lightning Fish Games*
17.00 - 17.15	**Break**				
17.15 - 18.00	**The Develop Den Opinion Jam 2009**				

The Audio Track (runs Thursday, July 16th)

09:30 - 09:45 Welcome and Introduction
John Broomhall

09:50 - 10:20 Dolby in Games – Every Bit Amazing
Simon Arnold, Dolby Games Group EMEA & Marc Langsman, Dolby Games Group EMEA

10:20 - 11:00 Real-time Audio: Context Is Everything
Kenneth Young, Audio Designer, Media Molecule

11:00 - 11:20 Break

11:20 - 12:00 Guerrilla Tactics: Designing Audio for Killzone 2
Mario Lavin, Sound Director, Guerrilla Games

12:00 - 12:40 Moore's More Story-Telling Power of Sound: The Eagerly Anticipated Sequel To Last Year's Highly Popular Session
Paul Moore

12:40 - 13.40 Lunch

13:40 - 14:20 Orchestral Soundtracks for Videogames: The Vital Do's & Don'ts For a Successful Orchestral Project
Allan Wilson

14:20 - 15:00 Painting With Sound: The Future of Procedural Audio
Andy Farnell

15:00 - 15.30 Break

15:30 - 16:10 Gold Blend: Audio Code and Design Working Together for the Perfect Flavour
Jeremy Mayne, Disney Black Rock Studio & Ciaran Rooney, Disney Black Rock Studio

16:10 - 17:00 AUDIO KEYNOTE: The Runtime Studio in Your Console: The Inevitable Directionality of Game Audio
Guy Whitmore, Director of Audio, Microsoft Game Studios

16:30 - 17:20 The 2009 Open Mic Session: What next?
Alastair Macgregor (Senior Audio Programmer, Rockstar North), Greg O'Connor-Read (Founder, Music4Games), Guy Whitmore (Director of Audio, Microsoft Game Studios), & Kenneth Young (Audio Designer, Media Molecule)

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Confirmed speakers for the 2009 conference include:

Peter Moore (President of EA Sports) - Peter Cowley (Managing Director of Digital Media, Endemol UK)
Kristian Segerstrale (CEO and Founder of Playfish) - Timo Soininen (CEO of Sulake Corporation)
Jim Crowley (President and CEO of Turbine Inc.) - Sean Dromgoole (CEO of Some Research)
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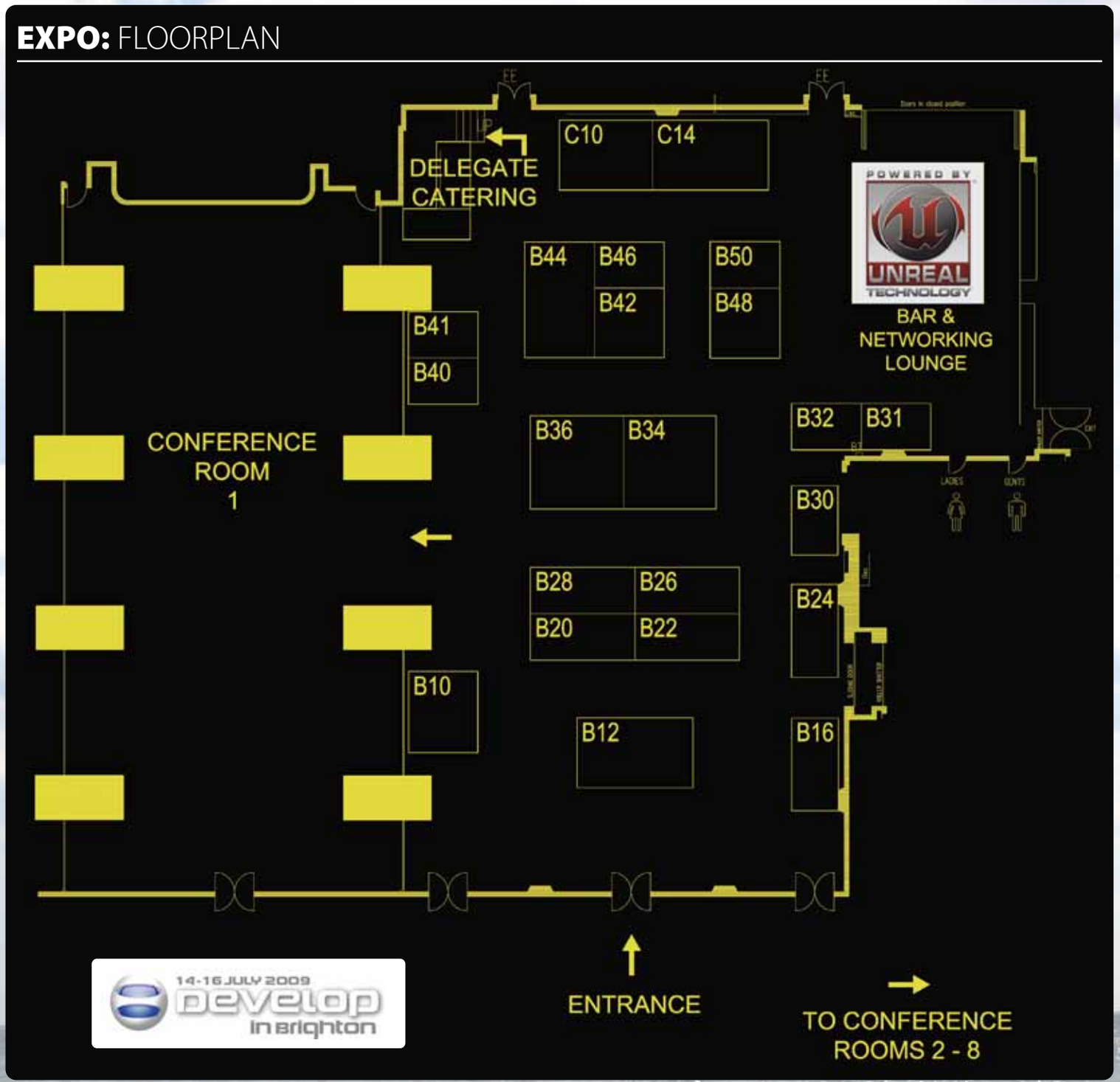

EXPO: JULY 15th & 16th

Running alongside the Conference is the Develop Expo, which is free for visitors to attend and brings together some of Europe's most innovative companies from every sector of games development.

For visitors, it offers the opportunity to find out about the latest development tools and technology, to try them for yourself, as well as make new contacts and catch up with old ones in the networking areas.

The Develop Bar & Networking Lounge is located on the Expo floor so you don't have far to go to buy a colleague a drink, have an informal meeting or just mix with other visitors. The exhibitors are:

AWE **B31**
B-Block Studios **B22**
BlitzTech **B20**
Custom House **B36**
Dolby **B34**
Emergent Game Technologies **B16**
Enzyme Labs **B42**
Hansoft **B48**
Nokia Products Ltd **C14**
Peppermint P **B50**
Phonetic Arts **B30**
Pixelux **B32**
Scaleform Corporation **B12**
Southampton Solent University **B24**
TechExcel **B46**
The Register Books **B40**
Tiga **B28**
Train2Game **B10**
Wired Sussex **B26**

EDITORS' PICKS: OUR TEAM CHOOSES THE CONFERENCE'S BEST SESSIONS

Michael French
Editor-in-chief

Public Service Gaming
Thursday, 11:00 - 12:00; Alice Taylor, Channel 4
Channel 4 is one of the most interesting of the 'new wave' of games companies, mixing content commissioning with its public service remit. These insights should make for an illuminating session.

Designer mash-up: David Braben and Dave Jones play Elite and GTA
Wednesday, 13:30 - 14:30
Dave Jones and David Braben are real luminaries, and to be able to see them play their games and give insights into their design and development processes should prove fascinating.

Ed Fear
Deputy Editor

Lessons Learned at the Global Game Jam
Thursday, 13:00 - 14:00; Susan Gold, Full Sail
This year's Global Game Jam event saw over 1,600 people working together to create games, and this session will explore how that rapid prototyping can help full-scale development.

10 Things Nobody Tells You About Digital Distribution and Self-Publishing…
Tuesday, 11:45 – 12:30; Martyn Brown, Team 17
Every developer is talking about embracing the self-publishing movement online, but it's not without it's own pitfalls, which Brown – having turned Team 17 into an exclusively self-publishing studio – will enumerate from his experience.

Will Freeman
Staff Writer

From Light Bulb to Console: The Writing Process
Wednesday, 16:30 – 17:30; Sini Downing, James Swallow, Justin Villiers, Andy Walsh
Three of the industry's leading writers shed light on the mysteries of dialogue for those not directly involved in game scripting.

ART KEYNOTE: The Art of LittleBigPlanet
Wednesday, 16:30 – 17:30; Kareem Ettouney and Mark Healey, Media Molecule
The Media Molecule founders and art director discuss the creative processes behind integrating a game's look and functionality.

Rob Crossley
Online Editor

Are You Going to Retire as a Game Developer?
Wednesday, 11:00 – 12:00; Ed Daly, Zoe Mode
Not many people consider their future in the games industry, largely because it's so young itself – but, as the pioneers get older, where do you go from here?

Gamesification: Turning Other Things into Games
Thursday, 16:00 – 17:00; Maurice Suckling, The Mustard Corporation
Game versions of other IP are, in general, mistreated – so how do we go about doing a better job of it? Suckling's session will examine case studies and, hopefully, give all sorts of helpful tips.

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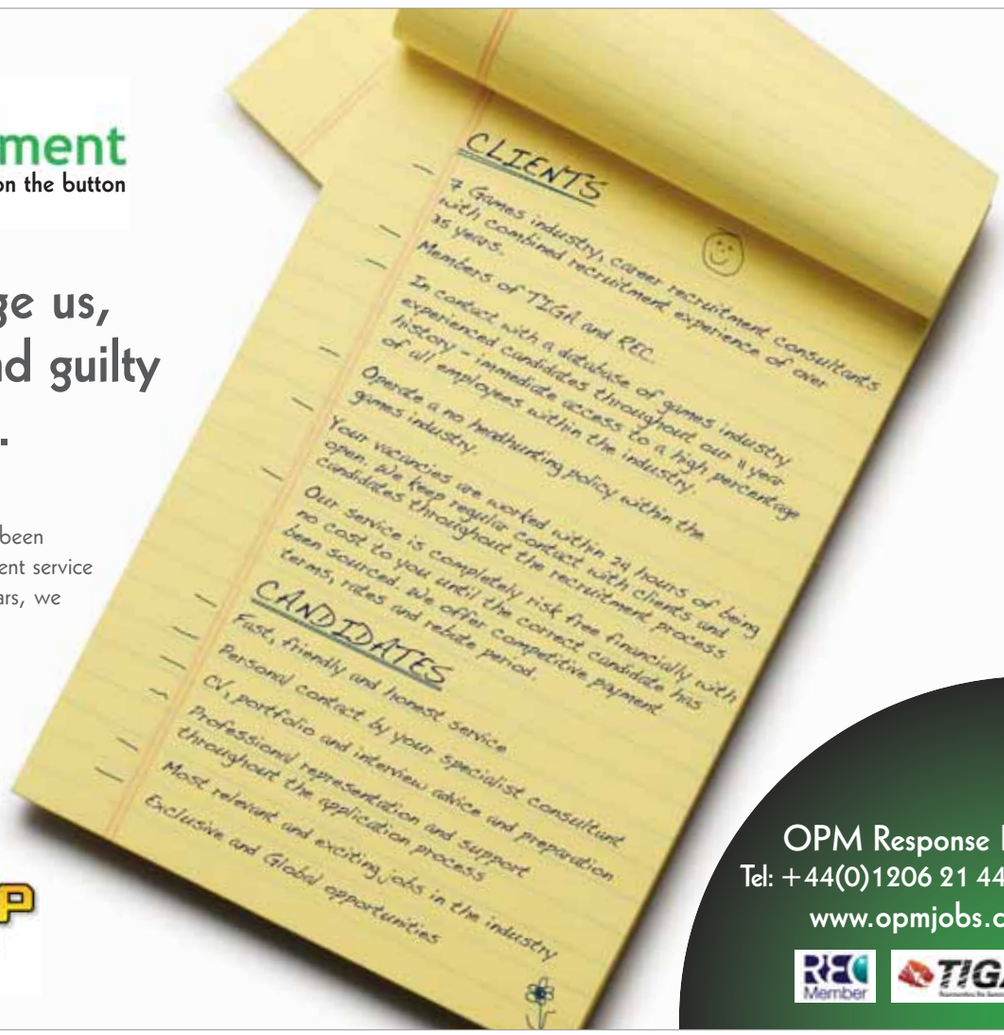
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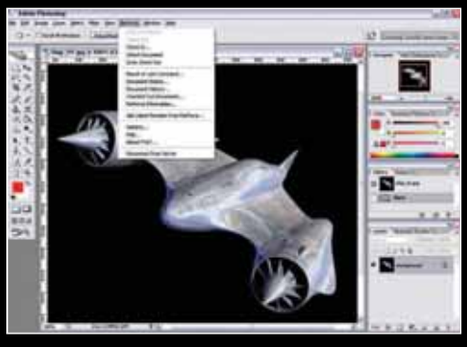

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Contact: hollie@aswift.com

Senior Producer
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Poland
City Interactive is one of the fastest-growing global video game publisher-developers. Due to expansion, they are now looking to recruit a highly experienced Producer to head up development at their Warsaw HQ. This is a critical role within the organisation with the successful candidate being tasked with leading between one to three internal projects, setting up the initial project schedules and then driving the projects from beginning to end.

Contact: simon@aswift.com

SFX Artist - Volatile Division
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Midlands
This is a fantastic opportunity to work on a AAA 3rd person action title for a major publisher. You will be responsible for creating special effects, in particular high quality particle effects. The successful candidate should have similar experience in a games environment. It may be that you have worked primarily as an Environment Artist, but have an aptitude for special effects.

Contact: dan@aswift.com

Senior Tools Programmer - Blitz Tech Division
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Contact: lisa@aswift.com

SEVERAL CONSULTANTS FROM OUR TEAM WILL BE ATTENDING THE DEVELOP CONFERENCE AND AWARDS CEREMONY. IF YOU ARE A RECRUITING DEVELOPER AND WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS VACANCIES, OR A CANDIDATE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR A CAREER MOVE PLEASE CONTACT THE TEAM TO ARRANGE A MEETING AND PICK UP A FREE YO-YO!

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HEARD ABOUT: How Fable II got its soundtrack , p76

TOOLS: CRI guns for smartphones

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KEY RELEASE: Microsoft's Kodu

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FEATURE: QA as a route to dev jobs

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Light fantastic

Cutting-edge rendering and lighting tech in focus, p72

EPIC DIARIES: CROSSING THE BORDERLANDS > P77

Will VidZone kill the MTV star?

MY FAVOURITE THING RELEASED on the PlayStation 3 this month wasn't *inFamous* – although it is a frustratingly brilliant game – nor was it the awesome eco-*Tetris*/*Katamari* mashup *Trash Panic*. No, it was the launch of VidZone: Sony's music video-on-demand service, like MTV or The Box but with a playlist you control. Or maybe it'd be more zeitgeisty to describe it as Spotify, but for music videos.

No matter how you describe it, it's an awesome example of forward-thinking on behalf of a company that, when it's come to online, has largely been playing catch-up with Microsoft. It's also probably a scary thought for companies like MTV: not only are TV viewers now controlling when they watch traditional TV content through PVRs, they're also now doing it for music videos through their PS3s.

Of course, the content delivery side of it is intriguing in its execution, but one interesting thing we were told recently was how it uses Scaleform GFx to handle its interface. Interesting because VidZone is free to all PS3 owners, both in terms of initial cost and subscription, in which you might think it might be cost-prohibitive to deploy middleware.

As consoles become less game machines and more media centres, the opportunities for middleware to be used in a non-game context is certainly bigger. Take CRI for example – its focus on sound and video compression systems might have spelled disaster as we move into the Blu-ray era, but with efficient internet transmission of these very things now a vital cornerstone in the format war, there's all new opportunities to exploit. And especially on the still-bandwidth-constrained smartphones, onto which CRI is training its eyes. What I wouldn't give for a proper release of Spotify on Android.

Ed Fear
ed.fear@intentmedia.co.uk

< CODING >

Smart thinking

With the iPhone still stealing developers' hearts across the world, is it a market ripe for middleware exploitation? **Ed Fear** spoke to the head of CRI Middleware's new smartphone division, Tomonori Haba, to talk iPhone, the smartphone future and Japan as a middleware market…

Why has CRI chosen to enter the smartphone market now?
At CRI we've been offering middleware for home consoles and arcade machines for over ten years, starting with the FM-TOWNS and expanding to systems such as the Saturn, Dreamcast, PS2, Xbox, Gamecube, and now PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PSP and DS. However, we weren't particularly active in the mobile arena. There were a lot of companies that already specialised in middleware for Java or BREW developers, and we didn't really see the benefit of being the last person to the party.

However, recently there's been a real push towards open mobile platforms, and the specs of phones have really advanced too – they're now powerful enough to be considered as entertainment devices. I saw this and realised that the time had come for CRI to port its movie, audio and compression solutions to mobile platforms, and so started the smartphone division.

The launch of the iPhone in Japan was also a big reason behind us establishing the division, I think, but we're not just looking to offer our middleware on iPhone – we want to be able to support Android, Windows Mobile, Symbian OS and all other smartphone platforms. And we're not just offering middleware, either – we plan to expand into helping produce and develop iPhone, iPod Touch and other smartphone apps, as well as help with all kinds of promotion and business matchmaking.

Do you think that those other smartphone platforms hold much potential for game developers?
I think that all of the smartphone platforms hold equal potential for the future. It's just that the huge success of the iPhone has been seized upon as a great phenomenon – and a very encouraging one at that.

The operating systems that smartphones run on are being used more and more outside of the smartphone industry – various machines are being developed that run on Android, for example, and of course the iPod Touch runs on the iPhone OS even though it's not a phone. So, in that regard, the word 'phone' doesn't actually matter that much. We think that the smartphone OS industry isn't bound to things made specifically for phones, but can be applied to all sorts of digital gadgets and machines.

You've performed a number of surveys about smartphone development – what have you learnt about the Japanese market's attitude to the iPhone?
One interesting thing that came up from the survey was just who is actually developing the iPhone apps within studios. I figured it would have been those teams that work on the PSP or DSi, or maybe Java or BREW teams if they had those. But, looking at the results, more frequently it was the console teams – PS3, Xbox 360 and Wii – that were doing it.

I thought this was interesting, so decided to investigate further. I think that they don't think of it as just being a phone or as a mobile platform, but as one of the many digital distribution platforms alongside XBLA, PSN, WiiWare, DSiWare and PSPgo. So, I think that developers are looking at the iPhone as a base platform for downloadable content and games. When you decide to make a digitally distributed game, in order to minimise the risk involved and get it in front of as many people as possible, it's natural to think of doing it on multiple platforms. I think that's why there's more console teams making iPhone games than mobile teams. I'm interested to see whether this is just a trend in Japan, or whether it's something that's the same the world over.

CRIWARE™ mobile

CRI's Tomonori Haba. He loves his iPhone, he does.

Are there things that are turning developers off the iPhone?
One of the barriers is that, to develop for iPhone, you have to use a Mac. The truth is, only a few of those Japanese game developers surveyed had experience of developing with Macs – only 23 per cent. 64 per cent had no experience but did want to work on iPhone. This is really important: it shows that the Mac is making inroads into game development, but also that literacy with Macs is a problem. I think that's an aspect with which our solutions can help.

Are you planning to localise your smartphone middleware into English?
Yeah, it's on the radar. Because we're a Japanese company, we tend to create products first and foremost for Japanese developers, but we want to share our technology with developers in the US and Europe too. If we get a lot of requests, it'll certainly expedite the development of an English version, so please do get in contact if you're interested.

What types of middleware are iPhone developers looking for?
From those we surveyed, the most demanded type of middleware was audio middleware – around 50 per cent. We think that our established solutions, CRI ADX and CRI Audio, can support this. In addition, given that only apps under 10MB can be downloaded over-the-air, developers need to compress all of their data – not just audio and video – which is where our general purpose compression system FileMajik Pro can help. Finally, a really big area in demand is for movie playback. The current SDK's support for playing back video is limited, and so we've made our CRI Sofdec available on the platform, which gives more freedom and extends the scope for playback.

You recently teased a new piece of middleware called CLOUDIA – can you tell us anything about what it might be?
I can't say too much at the moment, but… if I was to explain it simply, as the name suggests, it's linked to the 'cloud'. In other words, it's a marketing support tool that links together apps and servers. It's marketing middleware, but in a cloud form.

The middleware we've created so far has been geared towards developers, helping increase the quality of audio or solutions for playing movies. CLOUDIA, on the other hand, is perhaps more geared towards producers. Developers working on a number of products won't necessarily achieve good sales on all of them. It's a plan to get those difficult-to-notice apps in front of more people. We'll be able to say more in the autumn, I think.

> ***"There has certainly been a section of the Japanese industry that's been cautious about adopting middleware, but that is changing."***

Japan has traditionally been seen as a difficult market for middleware makers to break. Do you think that there's still a reticence amongst Japanese developers when it comes to adopting middleware?
In the console market, there has certainly been a section of the Japanese industry that's been cautious about adopting middleware, and have been skeptical as to the real practical benefits and results – but that situation is changing.

Game development has become a gigantic undertaking, and so as the cost of development has suddenly skyrocketed, developers want to be more efficient. In that sort of environment, more and more people are using middleware. In addition to that tailwind, there's an attitude starting to permeate through the industry that more time should be spent on planning, the 'pursuit of fun' and the actual content itself – and that can be done by using middleware, as European and US developers do. According to a survey we did some time ago, 95 per cent of game developers want to introduce or use middleware. This figure is the best proof that Japanese developers really are changing.

Originally, Japan has been able to boast that it was the birthplace of game culture. It's a country particularly skilled at producing innovative games – titles that are full of ideas – and I think it's also been particularly good at creating small-scale titles on handhelds. So, if you consider this skill at small- to medium-scale development as a speciality, then Japanese game development culture is still applicable in the smartphone space. Compared to the tough head-on fight between Japan and an entertainment giant like America in the console space, in the smartphone market I think Japanese developers have a huge advantage.
www.cri-mw.com

GUIDE: RENDERING MIDDLEWARE

As more and more games feature vast, open worlds and even more stark visual styles, occlusion culling and global illumination technology is now more in-demand than ever, as **Ed Fear** discovers…

The term 'rendering middleware' might well make you raise at least one of your eyebrows. After all, 'rendering' is a pretty vague term.

In truth, it's a way for us to umbrella two fields that are somewhat related but perhaps not quite established enough to warrant a round-up all of their own.

Not that either of these two areas – occlusion culling and lighting – are any less important than other sectors we might cover. If one trend was started last generation, it was the move to more open-world, sandbox style games that gave players freedom to make their own adventures, and it's a trend that's showing no signs of stopping.

Almost invariably, these games take place in vast cityscapes – and so being able to quickly cull swathes of irrelevant geometry is more important now than it ever was. Consoles may be more powerful these days, but that doesn't mean wasted cycles are any more palleteable than they ever were.

Lighting, on the other hand, is certainly becoming one of the big differentiators when it comes to game visuals. Look at the praise heaped on Lionhead's *Fable II* for its volumetric light scattering (okay, maybe not in quite those words) and how *Mirror's Edge* used stark lighting with primary colours to create a unique and appreciated visual aesthetic.

Thing is, though, that artists have understandably had enough of placing hundreds of lights across even the smallest of scenes just to make it look right, then being forced to wait for lightmaps to bake before they can see the results. Dynamic, global, entirely real-time lighting will not only provide much more aesthetically appealing scenes, but will also give artists the time to focus on more important endeavours.

BEAST

ILLUMINATE LABS
LIGHTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF GAMES

DEVELOPER
Illuminate Labs

CLIENTS
Crystal Dynamics, Sony Online Entertainment, A2M, EA DICE, Guerrilla Games, Game Republic, EA Bioware

PLATFORMS
All (integrations available for UE3 and Gamebryo)

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
sales@illuminatelabs.com

EA DICE's Mirror's Edge is one of the more prominent titles to use Beast

www.illuminatelabs.com

Beast is an advanced global illumination lightmapper that calculates lightmaps, shadow maps and point clouds with soft shadows, ambient occlusion, and colour scattering from coloured objects and also transparent entities. It can also generate light probes for dynamic lighting of objects in real-time, which can then be loaded in with a simple C++ library. It also supports offloading map generation to distributed processors like Condor or Incredibuild.

ENLIGHTEN

Geomerics

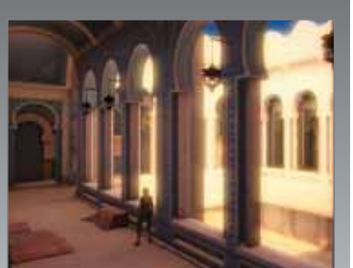
DEVELOPER
Geomerics

CLIENTS
CCP

PLATFORMS
Xbox 360, PS3, PC

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
sales@geomerics.com



Dynamic radiosity lets artists iterate lighting and see results in real-time

www.geomerics.com

Geomerics' big push with Enlighten is that the tech straddles the gap between radiosity and global illumination, providing a real-time radiosity solution with specular highlights from bounced lighting. It takes a general description of a scene's direct lighting and computes lightmaps in real-time, as well as light probes to describe the indirect lighting environment. Because it generates textures, they can be integrated with your shaders. It's also now integrated into Unreal Engine 3.

UMBRA

umbra

DEVELOPER
Umbra Software

CLIENTS
Turbine, EA Bioware, CCP, ArenaNet, Funcom, Game Arts, Monumental, Remedy

PLATFORMS
Xbox 360, PS3, PC

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
sales@umbrasoftware.com

Umbra gives advanced occlusion culling without requiring any preprocessing

www.umbrasoftware.com

Umbra is an occlusion culling solution that works at run-time, working out the visible objects in a scene so that occluded objects are not wastefully rendered. Because it works at run-time, objects can be moved, added and removed at run-time without causing a hitch, and it also means that level builders don't have to spend time creating portals, tagging zones or splitting up level meshes – it's all automatic. Integrations are available for UE3, Gamebryo, HeroEngine and BigWorld.

VISOR

WIZAID

DEVELOPER
Wizaid

CLIENTS
Not disclosed

PLATFORMS
All

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
contact@wizaid.com

Visor is supremely lightweight, doing most of its work in the preprocessing phase

www.wizaid.com

Wizaid says that it created Visor to advance the PVS system into the million-polygon model age. Despite this, its API contains only six public functions and consists of just 450 lines of C. That may sound like it doesn't do much, but that's not the case: Visor is the opposite of Umbra in that it is squarely based in the preprocessing phase, with four tools that partition level geometry through a GUI or via the command-line. It also uses bounding-volume visibility queries to cull dynamic objects.

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KEYRELEASE

Kodu

Can you teach kids to make games with just a joypad? **Ed Fear** investigates…

PRODUCT: Kodu
COMPANY: Microsoft Research
PRICE: TBA
CONTACT: Download via Xbox Live
research.microsoft.com/en-us/projects/kodu

Left: Kodu's language in action, clearly showing the division between conditions and actions

Top: The condition wheel shows how triggers are linked to real-life verbs and concepts

Above: Matt MacLaurin, program leader and lead designer of Kodu

For a wannabe game developer, the path to becoming one is both harder, and easier, than it ever was. While the technological barrier to entry is higher than ever, programmes such as Microsoft's XNA and Xbox Live Indie Games are providing new easy routes of entry.

The thing is, says Kodu program leader and lead designer Matt MacLaurin, they all provide very different results to what kids are used to seeing on consoles.

"You can go and tell kids that they can make games, but if they're just moving GIFs around the screen, it's like a gaming ghetto. We wanted something where kids could make things that were as cool as, and that had the production values of, things that they'd buy."

Initially, he says, the team looked to create a programming language that was not only easy to learn and intuitive to non-programmers, but also could be used without a keyboard. What they came up with not only ticks all of those boxes – although we're no strangers to code, we're knocking up little games within ten minutes of first getting our hands on the controller – but also exceeded their expectations.

"You know, when kids look to learn programming today, the tutorials around the internet are all about drawing rectangles to the screen in Java. It's really hard to care about that.

"We started off very interested in the programming aspect of it, including inventing a new programming language, but we realised that we couldn't really solve the programming problem if we didn't solve the design problem at the same time. This lead to the breakthrough: presenting programming as a design process."

The language is essentially event based: 'lines' of code are split into two segments, a condition and the actions to execute. Conditions are expressed in terms of sensors, such as hear, bump, 'standing on' and timers – each explicity linked to everyday verbs.

> ***"With Kodu you can sit down with someone and make a game in real-time. It's a whole different social context for coding."***

Because each character or item has its own routines, the language is essentially concurrent and object-orientated from the ground-up. It's even Turing complete, and other arms of Microsoft Research have expressed desire to do work on tools and dead code detectors for the language. But that doesn't mean it's there to teach people about programming, MacLaurin asserts.

"You'll notice that I've not used words like 'variable' or 'branch. We decided very early that we weren't trying to teach people Java or C#. The language has been driven just as much by the usability process as by any sort of language theory. We continually get unexperienced kids and people into the labs to see where they go; see the barriers they encounter and then try to remove them. Every time we add a new verb to the language, we'll get the usability labs to get people in and make sure that it works in the way they'd expect."

Of course, while code is a bitch, you can't get anywhere without assets – and it's here where Kodu is slightly less flexible, but only so that it can eventually get out of the door. It's planned to release with around 20 different characters and objects, which may not sound like a huge amount, but the team is planning to add more as time goes on.

"You have to look at this as being like Lego: yeah, we are going to give you a fixed set of components to play with, but we intend to make more plugins available as time goes on. There'll be more characters, more abilities, stuff like that.

"For a lot of people Kodu encapsulates why they got into the industry in the first place, and what they're not able to do these days – pursue crazy ideas, really innovate. With XNA, even if we gave you the assets it'd take you weeks to get going.

"Kodu is different: you can sit down with someone and make a game with them in real-time. I can sit down with my daughter, and she can come up with these ideas and I can make them for her as we sit there. It's a whole different social context for coding."

Share ware

While being able to make your own creations is a great prospect, it's a slightly hollow one if there's no way to let others play your masterpiece. Given that Kodu is being released on Xbox Live, though, such networking magic runs through its veins.

"Yeah, we are absolutely doing sharing," confirms MacLaurin. "We've got a peer-to-peer sharing model in place at the moment, where you can invite your friends over Xbox Live to come and play your game – just like starting a multiplayer match in a normal game. I think we're the first people to do peer-to-peer sharing on Xbox Live.

"From the very beginning, we've wanted to make sure that the data format behind these games is extremely compact so that they can be shared easily. With our current system, you can make terrains a mile long and they'd still fit on a floppy disk."

If you were hoping for a slightly more comprehensive server-based solution for sharing games – maybe something that highlights the best of user creations, much like the Xbox Live Community Games Channel – MacLaurin hears you.

"We do have a small research project working on a server-based system in schools in New Zealand, Sweden, Canada and Australia. It's a really good opportunity for us to study online sharing communities. There are some people out there that really like to create a lot of stuff."

HEARD ABOUT
Fable II

John Broomhall makes it his quest to find out the story behind Fable II's much-celebrated musical score…

DEVELOPER:
Lionhead

PUBLISHER:
Microsoft

PLATFORM:
Xbox 360

THE MUSIC TEAM:
Composer: Russell Shaw
Orchestrator/conductor: Allan Wilson
Engineer/executive music producer: Peter Fuchs

FABLE II MUSIC SCHEDULE:
Scoring, composing and orchestrating: eight weeks
Orchestral recording: one week
Choir and final mix: one week
Game implementation: two weeks

By any measure of videogames, it's not a huge stretch to call *Fable II* a triumph. First and foremost it's all about playing a part in a dramatic story. How you progress through that story, and the actions you take along the way, can trigger different outcomes and change the way you're perceived in the world, says the game's composer and audio director Russell Shaw. "Emotions are key in what we're trying to achieve and there are some very poignant moments."

From the outset, the team was determined to go all-out for serious acting talent, better writing, charismatic characters, more emotion and scripted music – all feeding Shaw's overall vision for the soundtrack.

"The story is about growing from a child to a hero. As such, the music box features a lot to reflect the character's lost childhood, and we used Tiffins Boys Choir for many choral sequences for similar reasons. We wanted the music to convey the world of Albion but also enhance the story. Each region had its own music built on descriptive keywords: Bowerstone, for example, is typified by the words Celtic, Scottish, folk and gentle.

"Each scripted moment had an accompanying scored piece. I knew we'd have to use a pretty hefty orchestra to achieve the richness we were after, and also that we'd need to record solo instrumentalists for the folk elements. I'm very lucky in that Peter gives me free reign to do what's right for the game. The game itself provides so much inspiration – musical ideas pop into my head as I'm playing it for the first time."

Shaw first sequenced his compositions in Cubase using The Vienna Instruments VST Symphonic Library and Reason's orchestral set before working with orchestrator and conductor Allan Wilson and the Slovak National Symphony Orchestra in Bratislava.

Meanwhile, a scratch mix from the MIDI score was used as placeholder in-game until the full mixdown was done at Phoenix Sound, Pinewood, UK.

Structurally, the music mainly compromises detailed scripted stereo cues and appropriate atmospheres, but a different approach was taken for combat, Shaw explains.

"Peter wanted the player to feel the combat sequences were building in intensity; that the hero was adding to the score depending on how well (or how poorly) he/she was doing. So we had five stereo streams which built in intensity – from, for example, a drone right up to full-on rhythm tracks. Each track would be faded in at key moments in the combat: new enemies joining the fight, maybe, or a new weapon selected. We limited the number of tracks heard per combat sequence, so if you're fighting a small beetle group you only hear maybe one or two tracks, whereas if you're fighting a boss you get four or five tracks.

> ***"There's a growing tendency to use an orchestra just because the budget allows for it."***
>
> Russell Shaw, Lionhead

"Additionally, we included two choir tracks in sync which gradually fade in as the player strings together more and more successful combat attacks on an enemy. If you're fighting really well you'll be hearing five stereo music tracks and two stereo tracks of choir. If you get hit during an attack the choir volume is drastically reduced. Further still, we've added musical/percussive stabs the instant a player uses his sword effectively – like a flourish or a combo move.

According to Shaw, reaction to *Fable II*'s music from fans and peers alike has been gratifying and humbling: "The score is far less melodic than *Fable I* as I wanted to get away from 'tunes'. I was a bit worried about this, as fans had expectations based on the original title but, thankfully, the music was well-received and nominated for BAFTA and AIAS awards. Given that I had very little time, the great reaction and overall quality and musicianship of the recordings is something for which I'm really grateful.

Ask Shaw how he feels about the current state of the game music industry and he's unequivocally upbeat.

"This is a brilliant time to be in game music. The divisions between being considered a movie or game composer have pretty much eroded completely; all that's left is ideas. We should be much more thoughtful about how we use those resources.

"I've played games with wall-to-wall music and it quickly becomes very tiring, so I've always strived to have non-musical areas of the game to give the musical areas more impact. There's also a growing tendency in the industry to use orchestra just because the budget allows for it rather than the game needing it. On our future titles, I will continue producing music for the game's sake rather than for the music's sake."

Lionhead's Russell Shaw hard at work

John Broomhall is an independent audio director, consultant and content provider
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www.johnbroomhall.co.uk

GEARBOX SOFTWARE'S BORDERLANDS
BUILT ON UNREAL ENGINE 3

Gearbox Software has reinvented its sci-fi shooter, *Borderlands*, with a new distinctive look. The game, which has always been powered by Unreal Engine 3, got an extended development timeline last year when the decision was made to launch in holiday 2009. The larger window proved to be a opportunity for the team's art department.

"From a small group of artists came an initiative to render the concept art style in the game," said Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox Software. "Have you ever seen a really cool looking concept car? Concept cars are always amazing. But we never get to drive them. Something always happens between the concept car and when it's finally manufactured and all the coolness is stripped away. I think our artists asked themselves why we couldn't just make the game look like the concept art. So they did it."

The prototype blew away management at Gearbox and publisher 2K Games. Pitchford said when people see screenshots, they want to know what the game looks like when it's moving in real-time 3D. And when they see it moving, they want to pick up the controller and walk through the world themselves.

"Unreal Engine 3 is a great platform for the art direction because it supports so many great features for the kinds of materials we want to render," said Pitchford. "It's also extensible; our engineers have added to and extended the engine's rendering features to make lighting and shading changes necessary for this distinctive look. We've been able to do this and remain compatible with the Unreal Engine 3 code base and accept new upgrades as they come, both from within Gearbox and from Epic, who are constantly improving the technology."

Gearbox's programmers have worked with its artists to add new rendering techniques that work with the content to create the astonishing look of *Borderlands* that is unlike anything seen before. Pitchford said it's an amazing testimony not only to the technical flexibility of UE3, but of the possibilities that can be unleashed when talented artists, designers and engineers are empowered to be creatively flexible.

Pitchford said his *Borderlands* team has also capitalised on the advancements from Epic's own *Gears of War 2*.

"With the success and quality of *Gears of War 2*, we leverage a huge amount of technology value," said Pitchford. "We use this to ensure that *Borderlands* looks amazing and runs fast on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC. But the look of the game is not even half of the story. The gameplay is amazing, too, and the results we're seeing are only possible with strong talent using great tools."

The *Borderlands* team also used UE3 to develop a data-driven system to support the creation of an artificial intelligence that procedurally generates each of the millions of different weapons in the game. This Gear Builder system and AI is new technology that Gearbox was able to seamlessly layer on top of UE3 without compromising systems. The end result is a game that looks and plays like no other experience out there. Pitchford said that one look at *Borderlands* is all that's needed for someone to see that Gearbox has used UE3 technology to create a look that is simultaneously familiar and yet unlike anything that's ever been seen before.

Pitchford concluded that *Borderlands* is a very robust, rare and valuable game experience that's been created from the mix of Gearbox Software's talent and the tools of Unreal Engine 3. In essence, it's the perfect marriage of creativity and technology.

Thanks to Gearbox Software for speaking with freelance reporter John Gaudiosi for this story, which will be posted in full at www.unrealtechnology.com

Gearbox Software's Borderlands for PS3, Xbox 360 and PC

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Please email: mrein@epicgames.com for appointments.

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Mark Rein is vice president of Epic Games based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1992 Mark has worked on Epic's licensing and publishing deals, business development, public relations, academic relations, marketing and business operations.
www.epicgames.com

Testing times

The old wisdom for those looking to get into the industry is to get into QA as the first step on the ladder – but rather than resist it, says Testology's **Andy Robson**, QA companies should exploit their testers' ambitions…

The video games industry now represents more than just the younger generations. As it grows and its years amount, the industry continues to establish relationships with new fans and maintain those developed in its younger years. This translates into adults more aware that games development is a viable career choice.

A heightened awareness of these work opportunities, combined with an acknowledgement within higher education, means that more individuals look to the industry for work or as an educational path.

Higher education is beginning to respond to the academic value and career promise of 'gaming', offering specialist degrees to help mould and shape the designers, artists and programmers of tomorrow. Although this is undeniably a positive step in developing an applied understanding of the industry, industry experience and comprehension can also be attained through quality assurance.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

'Lack of experience' is a term that is often synonymous with rejection and under qualification but, when conducting interviews, I do not necessarily value experience as an attribute more worthy of a job role than passion, for example. The success of this industry was born out of creativeness, inventiveness and an understanding of the targeted consumer. These skills cannot be generated by experience alone, but are usually a result of a passionate interest in gaming. At Testology, we like to encourage all candidates with varying experiences and backgrounds to apply for our testing positions. Testers are the consumer's eyes within the studio. They themselves are avid gamers who live and breathe gaming. This translates into enthusiasm, a vital characteristic when considering a testers role of assuring quality.

Even post graduation, with a degree in hand, it can be difficult to break into the graduate's chosen area without any experience of the industry. QA can offer this type of experience for people with ambitions in other areas of game development, but can also offer inexperienced non-graduates an opportunity to work in one of the world's leading industries. Interestingly enough,

> ***A heightened awareness of opportunities in the industry, plus attention from higher education, means more people now look to games for a career.***

some of the best QA contractors I have worked with are those who are non-graduates, whose primary motivation is a desire to learn and channel their passion for gaming into a paid job role. Experience is a valuable asset and its influence on the interview process is unquestionable, but the frustrations lie within the casual deflection of potentially talented 'inexperienced' applicants. Without an opportunity, these hidden 'gems' would remain undiscovered.

One thing to consider is the motivations for QA applicants. With an increasing number of unemployed, it is fair to question the motivations of these varied potential testers. Do they want to advance within the industry, interpreting QA as an obvious stepping stone? Is testing a role that will educate them on the development cycles and processes of game development? Or are they hugely passionate gamers whose lifestyles react to the latest releases, generating a desire to experience it first hand? No matter what the motivation, the underlying message is that QA is regarded as a way to progress a development career, or indeed progress a QA career. At Testology, we deal with a multitude of clients with a variety of developmental and methodological preferences. When we expose our contractors to these variations of projects and processes we educate them on adapting to projects, a valuable skill when considering different clients.

TAKE A BREAK

Testing is still, irrefutably, a way to break into the industry, with obvious progressions being design and production – although it's certainly not limited to those two professions alone. Testers, especially leads in management roles, need to be well organised, proactive and highly competent communicators. Managing databases, liaising with the development team, distributing workloads and reporting on the team's progression are tasks that develop a skill set that resembles those of a producer. Our testers have direct contact with our client's producers, which increases an awareness of a producer's job role and its similarities with a lead tester's.

The Testology team going about their daily business

The processes and methods applied to a lead tester's role can be translated to a production role with ease. This transition from tester to producer is natural because of the high frequency of contact between the two positions and the mirroring skill sets. Throughout my career I have interviewed, hired and trained many testers who have now established themselves as successful producers at influential developers – a testament to the value of a QA tester and the applicable attributes developed in this role.

At Testology, I have hired 108 applicants from 1,700 interviews, a small percentage in contrast to other testing departments, but an example of the opportunities offered in regards to interviews. It also highlights our attention to quality, something we value higher than quantity in our company.

When considering the procedures and practices of a QA tester, production is perhaps the most obvious role transition. However, when taking into account the focuses and role of a QA tester, it is more appropriate to make a comparison with design. Testers offer an objective perspective on a product, exhaustively playing and testing a title for eight hours a day. This vast understanding of the functionality and workings of a proposed design allows a tester to offer structured critique to improve and refine a design. The job expectations force a tester to criticise the work of programmers and designers which can often lead to them being considered as some sort of 'evil within'. Without this objectivity and consciousness of consumer expectations, products may not achieve quality levels demanded by the public. Again, as with production, I have hired and trained many QA testers who are now successful designers. My philosophy has always been to remain honest. If an area of game functionality is broken or could be improved it is the tester's job to communicate these views.

> ***"Testing is still, irrefutably, a way to break into the industry, with obvious progressions being production and design – but it's not limited to those two fields alone."***

OPINION JAM

Much of my early success was a result of my unrestrained honesty and a commitment to releasing the highest level of games possible. This was partly the reason for my great working relationship with Peter Molyneux, who at Bullfrog Productions and Lionhead Studios trusted, valued and expected my direct opinions. We promote the same philosophy at Testology, where our experience within these creative areas has allowed us to build a successful consultancy team. We have worked with many clients who send us game prototypes, semi/fully completed levels and even design documents to objectively assess the quality of the work and offer our opinions and suggestions for improvements. Usually, the client is surprised at the amount and quality of the feedback we present in our report, but always values and considers our opinions when making alterations.

When constructing levels for projects at Bullfrog, Peter Molyneux and I would work next to each other, me giving input on level design and suggesting improvements or alterations based on my experience as a gamer. On all projects, Peter would consult with me when considering the release of a game, with my objective opinion on its quality influencing his decision. Closely working with designers such as Peter allowed me put into practice the creative expertise that is produced from testing positions, the same experience we apply to our consultancy department at Testology.

We don't consider our testers as insignificant 'numbers', but instead nurture their skills so they can become well-rounded, capable workers in multiple development roles. When setting up QA departments at Bullfrog Productions and Lionhead Studios both Peter Molyneux and I both agreed on this point and considered QA staff as potential talent. Our testers have interests in other fields of games development; art, animation, modeling, audio, scripting and programming to name a few, and exploit their understanding of these fields when undertaking their QA tasks. The executive producers, artists, level designers, designers, scripters and coders I originally trained as QA contractors are sufficient evidence to suggest that testing is still unrivalled in developing development talent.

www.testology.com

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p82

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Studio News

This month: Crystal Dynamics, Realtime Worlds, Warner

Toby Gard, the creator of the *Tomb Raider* series, has once again shifted his role at **Crystal Dynamics**.

When the North Californian developer started *Tomb Raider Legend*, Gard joined the company as a consultant. As the studio moved on to develop *Tomb Raider Anniversary* – a retrospective on Gard's previous work – the British-born developer shifted his role to lead designer.

For Crystal Dynamics' third main *Tomb Raider* title, *Underworld*, Gard moved to serve as cinematic director.

Now, an unearthed Toby Gard profile on networking site LinkedIn shows that the industry veteran has is now 'leading a design group for an unannounced project.'

The revelation closely follows the news that Crystal Dynamics is once again working on a 'triple-A project' following a series of layoffs.

www.crystald.com

Realtime Worlds has announced that its workforce has surpassed the 250 mark, with plans in place to increase that figure to over 300 by early 2010.

In order to facilitate the studio's sudden influx of new workers, the Crackdown developer has acquired an additional 8,000 square feet of office space. This will take Realtime Worlds' studio capacity to some 34,000 square feet.

"The calibre and potential of games we are creating requires staff of the highest calibre, and we're proud to have found 250 immensely talented and creative individuals so far, and look forward to finding more like-minded people to join the family," said Realtime Worlds' CEO Gary Dale.

The company is now recruiting for 40 open vacancies, though it is not known if all positions are for projects beyond the crunch period for Realtime World's upcoming title *APB*.

www.realtimeworlds.com

Rare's community manager George Kelion has left his role at the developer, and has joined **Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment** in the European PR Team.

Kelion has worked at raising Rare's external profile for two years, where he liaised with the company's numerous fan sites to publicise information on a studio once famed for its secrecy, bringing it kicking and screaming into the internet age.

Prior to that, Kelion had worked as an account executive at PR firm Inferno Communications, as well as communications manager for Mac game publisher Feral Interactive.

Rare's Mike Wilson has assumed Kelion's responsibilities, as well as moderating Rare's *Banjo* forum.

www.warnerbros.com

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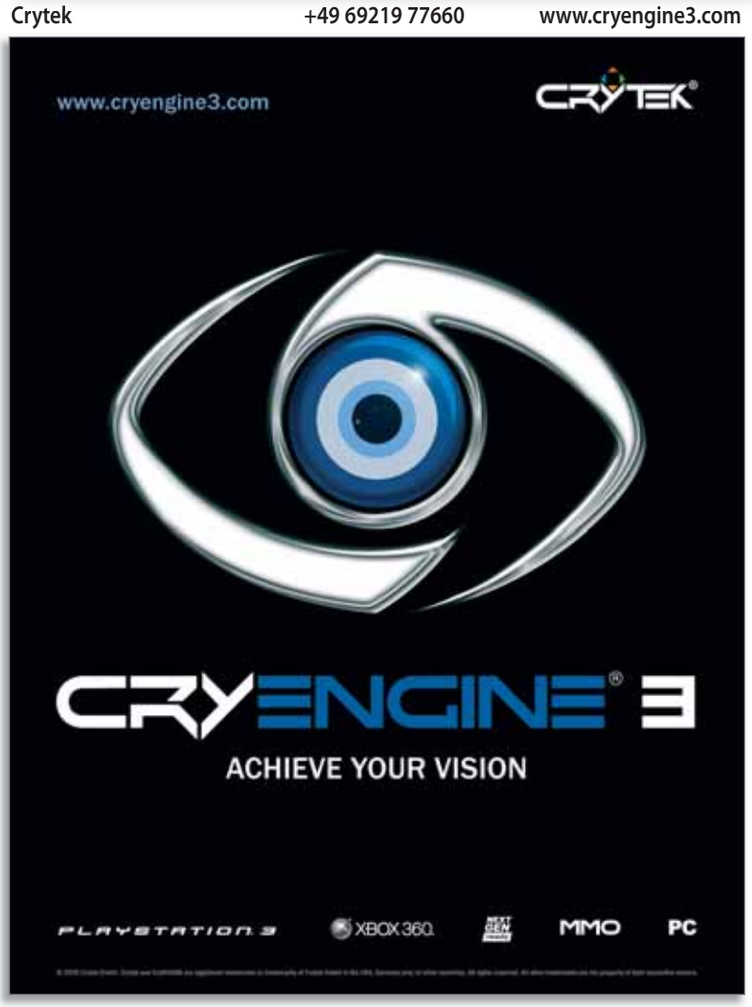

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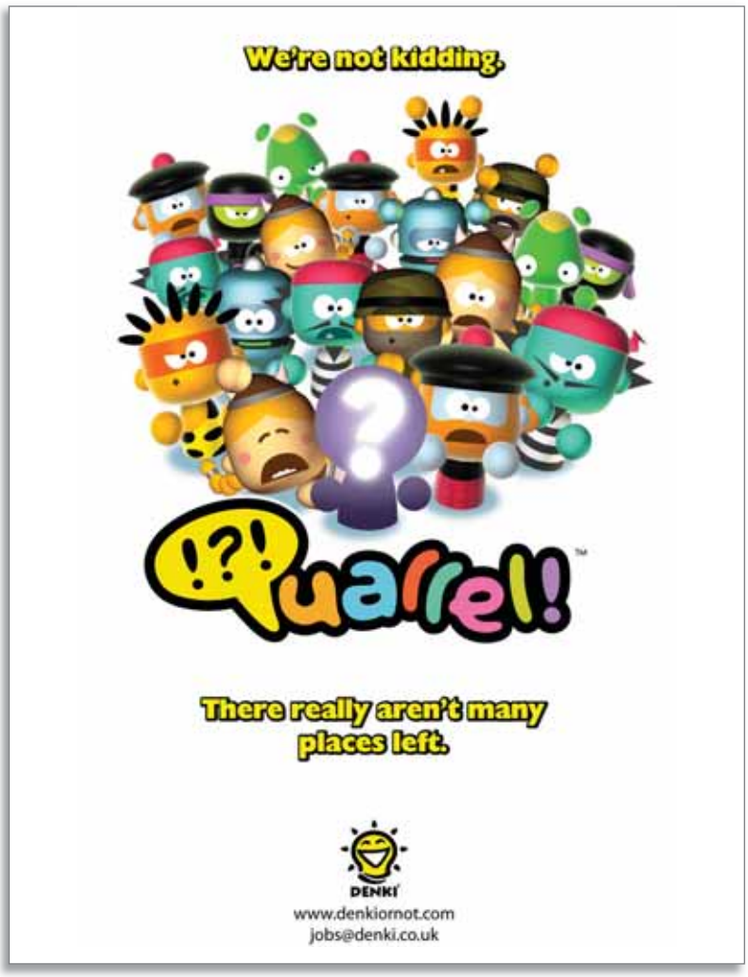

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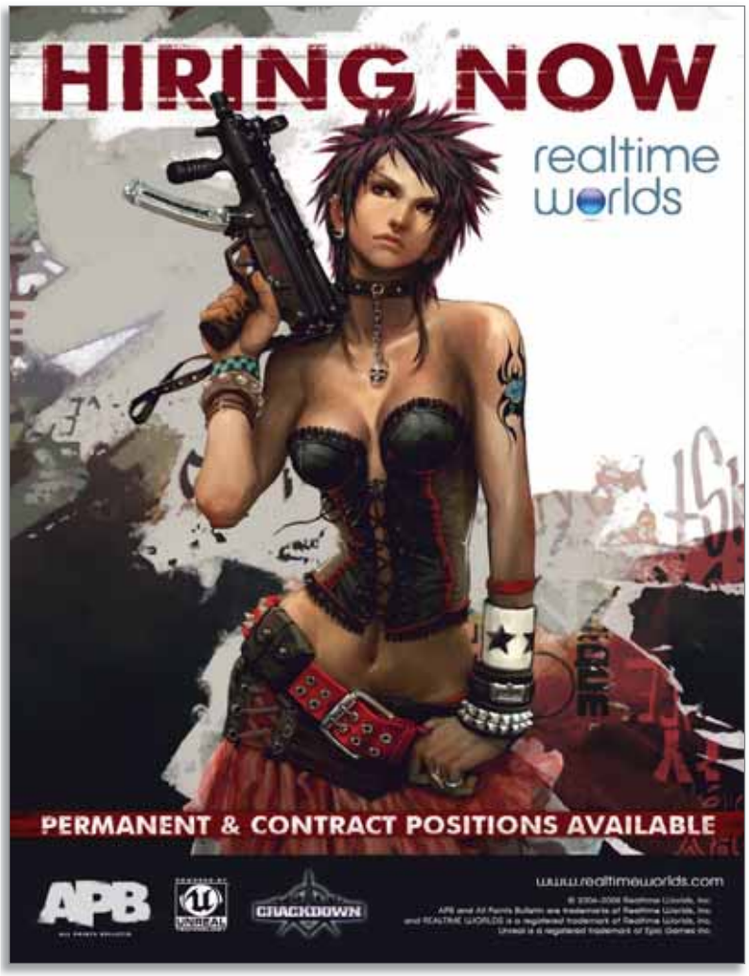

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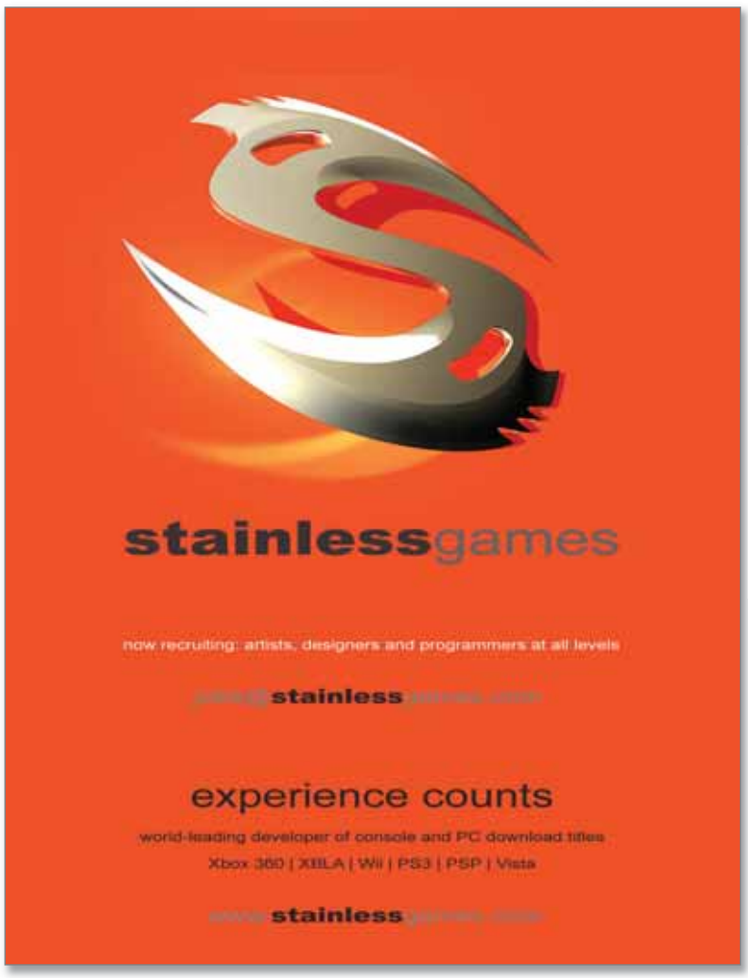
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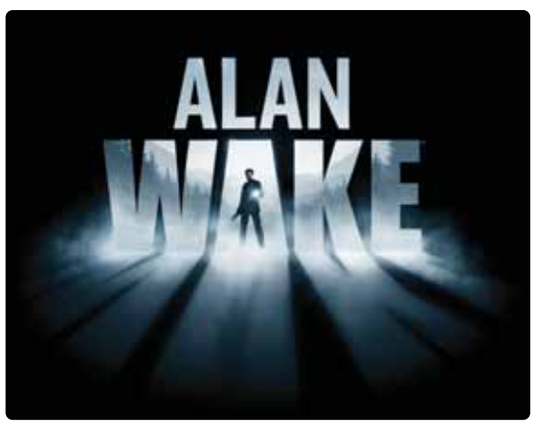
Tools News

Alan Wake employs Umbra middleware



Alan Wake developer Remedy Entertainment has licensed Umbra Software's rendering optimisation toolset to give a speed boost to the long-running project.

The Espoo, Finland-based developer has chosen Umbra for two key reasons. Firstly, the GPU-accelerated rendering optimisation middleware can speed up content creation. Secondly, the middleware can dramatically increase frame rates by culling huge amounts of geometry from the rendering phase. The toolset itself has been designed for production on Xbox 360, PC and PS3.

"Umbra gave a significant boost in rendering performance on the Xbox 360, and at the same time made our content creation faster," said Remedy Entertainment's development director Markus Mäki.

"With Umbra's culling technology, Remedy's team can add more details to Alan Wake's world and concentrate on the cool visuals while minimizing tedious work such as adding portals."

The Finnish studio – which was once responsible for the first two *Max Payne* games – joins a growing list of studios employing the Umbra tech, including BioWare, CCP and Turbine.

Remedy recently announced a partnership with motion-capture group Imagination Studios, ending a long spell of silence from the Finnish developer. Shortly after, the lead writer for *Alan Wake* had responded to concerns that the game was taking too long to develop, declaring that the Remedy team "is not a factory".

www.umbra.fi

New export pipeline coming to ZBrush 4

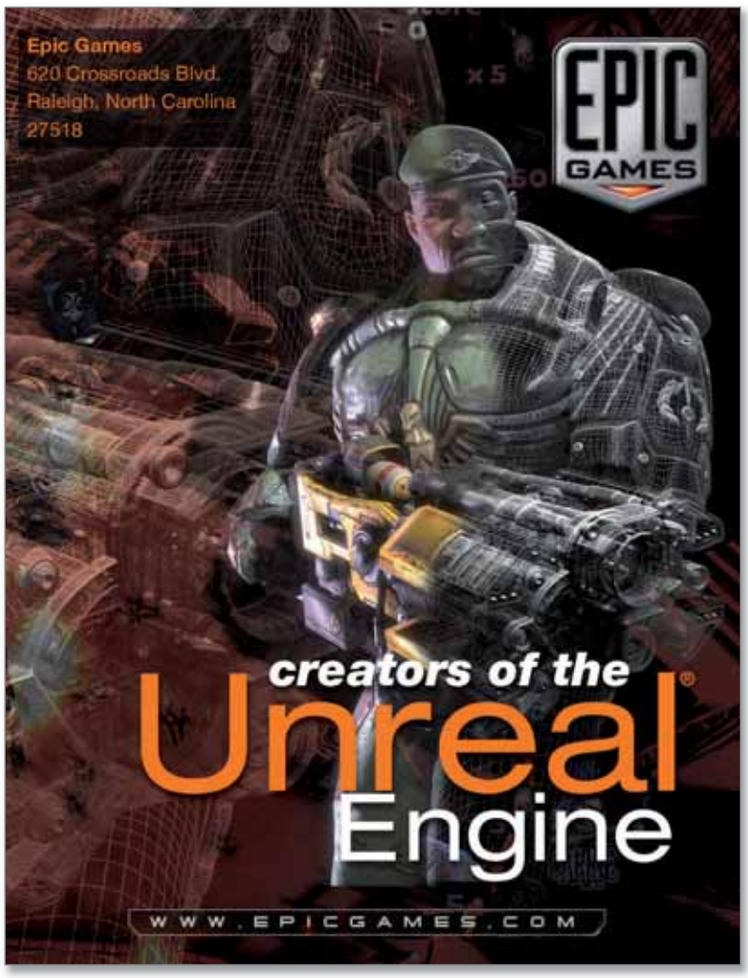
Pixologic has revealed GoZ, a new export pipeline set to feature in version 4 of popular sculpting app ZBrush.

GoZ aims to help artists spending less time fiddling with inter-application exporting by providing a pathway between ZBrush and apps such as Maya, Cinema 4D and modo. Not only does it help transfer geometry between these software packages, it also transfers texture, normal, and displacement maps and connects them to the appropriate shader networks in the destination app.

GoZ is set to be added in the next Mac OSX update of ZBrush, while Windows users will have to wait until version 4 is released in August.

www.pixologic.com

Epic +1-919-870-1516 www.epicgames.com



Tool Spotlight

FMOD EX AND DESIGNER

Together the FMOD EX API and FMOD Designer offer a comprehensive library and tookit for the creation and playback of interactive audio.

The EX system provides developers with a solid audio engine that offers sound designers, musicians and audio engineers a range of features, and when used in conjunction with the FMOD Designer package it provides the benefits of both a low-level and data-driven API.

The engine's advanced compressed sample and streaming support means that mp2, mp3, ADPCM and XMA files can be looped or sequenced with other samples, and the software lets developers use a number of formats including .WAV, .MIDI, .XMA, .OGG and .MOD.

EX also lets users create rich, realistic soundscapes by automatically applying volume, filtering, surround panning and Doppler effect to mono, stereo and multichannel samples positioned at sound sources throughout a 3D environment.

Compatible with all major console and computer platforms, EX's virtual voice allows a game to play thousands of sounds at once on limited hardware.

Meanwhile, for sound designers without programming knowledge, FMOD Designer provides easy-to-use access to FMOD EX's advanced low-level features, enabling modelling of complex events, creation of scores, wave bank management and auditioning in 3D.

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bluegfx 01483 467200 www.bluegfx.com

Services News

Heavy Rain dev to sell 'mo-cap packages'

Quantic Dream's famed mo-cap studio has launched the Motion Kit Collection, an 'evolving library' of animations and captured motions.

Motion Kit Collection Vol 1 will feature two motion kit libraries (one for each sex), both comprising of 84 generic motion animations, which totals 2 x 7 linear minutes of animation data.

Quantic Dream – the French studio behind *Fahrenheit* and the upcoming *Heavy Rain* – say that the new Motion Kit Collection is 'the industry's first high-end, off-the-shelf solution for real-time 3D character animation.'

With each humanoid animation captured using Quantic's 28-camera Vicon MX-F40 system, the motions can be used for building motion kits for both playable real-time characters and NPCs. Quantic has said this process will 'reduce time and budget outlays for prototyping, pre and full productions.'

The animation package is available in .FBX format, which are linkable with 3D software pipelines such as MotionBuilder, Maya, 3DS Max or XSI.

The animations were recorded at Quantic's Virtual Actor Studio in France.

www.quanticdream.com

New production company SMG Europe formed

London studio Supermassive Games has formed a new production department, which promises to provide project management and staff on a short or long term basis to other studios.

Claiming to be supporting development on some of the most significant releases due for the next 12 months, SMG Europe has the ability to conduct training, facilitation toward solutions, or hands-on production management.

The company aims to serve professionals looking for interim production management support at all levels, and publishers and investors seeking facilities to better development solutions. SMG Europe also offers independent and measured assessment of the direction of projects.

www.smgeurope.biz

Side provides casting for Castlevania

Audio production house Side has detailed its work on Konami's forthcoming addition to the hugely popular *Castlevania* series.

Side was commissioned to carry out casting for *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*, a co-production of Japanese studio Kojima Productions and Spanish dev MercurySteam, for which they assembled a collection of famous and highly regarded actors and actresses.

Those involved in providing dialogue for the game include Robert Carlyle, who has starred in successful movies including *Trainspotting* and *28 Weeks Later*, and esteemed stage actor Patrick Stewart, who is currently appearing in an adaptation of the play *Waiting for Godot* on the London stage. Stewart is most famous for his lead role in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Side's Kate Saxon provided voice direction for the script, which focuses on 'an epic tale of love and loss'. Side's London facilities were used for the recording.

www.side.com

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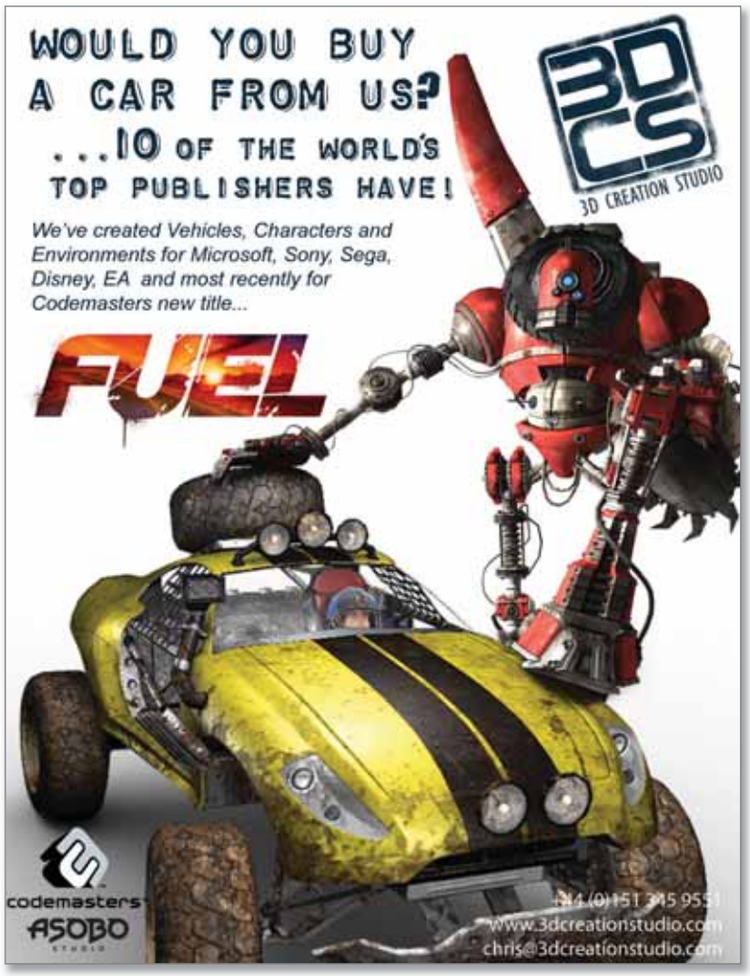
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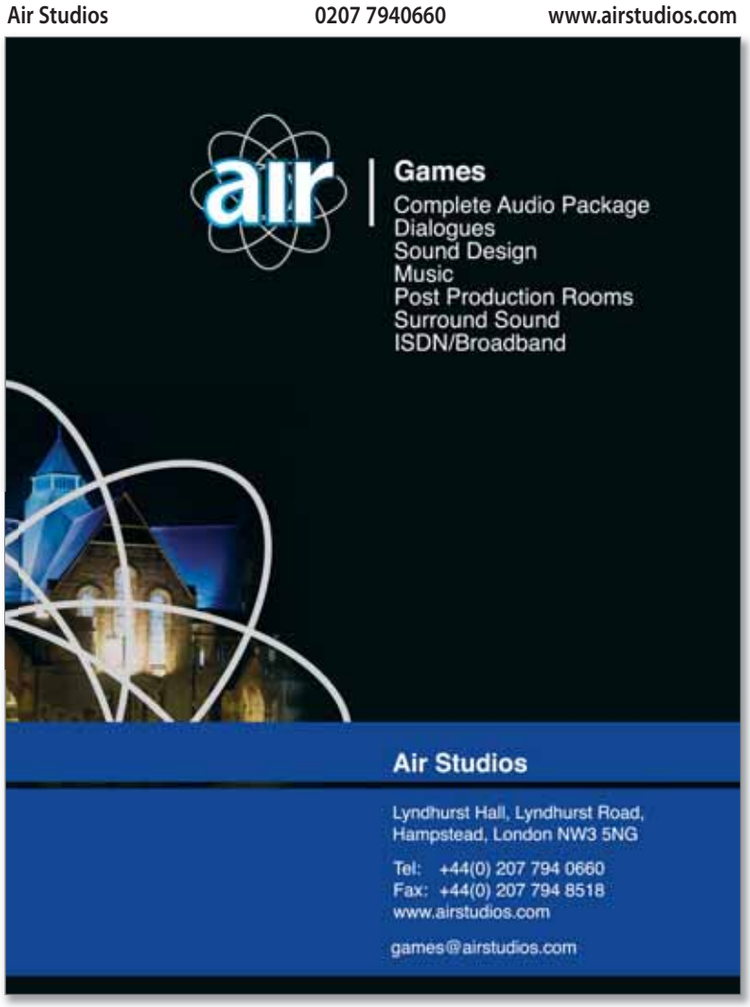

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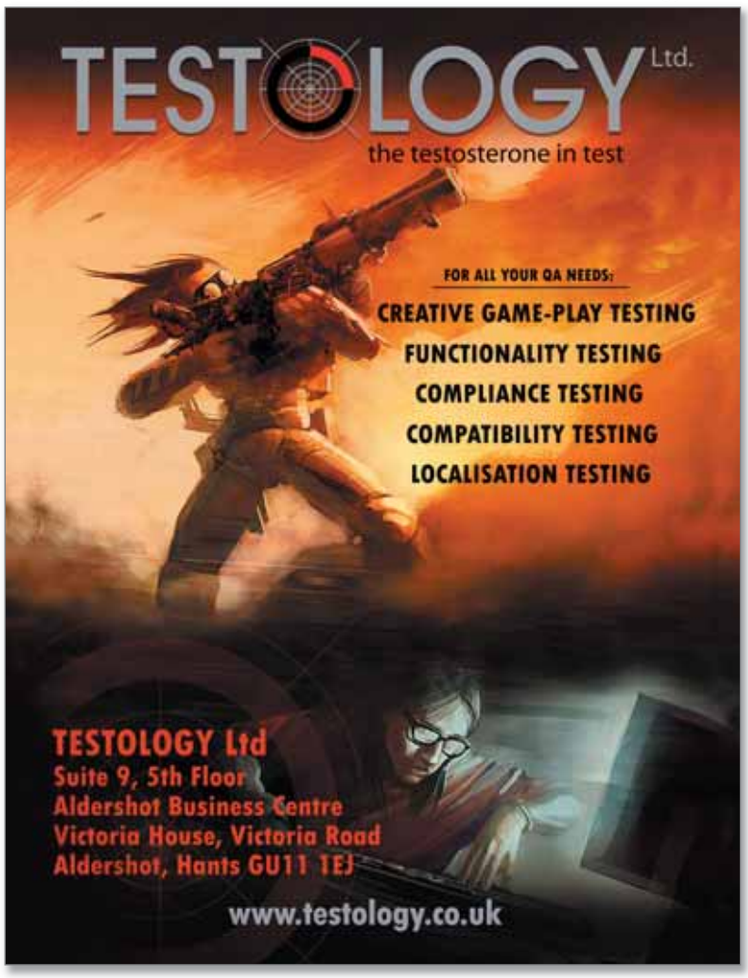

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Training News

Duke of York Dares to be Digital

Staff and students at the University of Abertay Dundee had the chance to show off the Dare to be Digital scheme to HRH The Duke of York recently.

At an event in London organised by Turner Broadcasting and UK Trade and Investment, the yearly game development competition was shown to the Duke of York as one of six projects selected by Turner to showcase its investment in the UK. He met Paul Durrant, director of business development at the University and organiser of Dare to be Digital, plus BAFTA winners Graham Ranson and Yves Wheeler, plus BAFTA nominee Richard Barlow (*pictured above, left to right*).

"We recognise that in addition to investment in technology development and new content to sustain growth, we must also continue to invest heartily in the future talent that will exploit and develop these technologies," said Laurie Baird, director of technology partnerships at Turner Broadcasting.

"Abertay University's Dare to be Digital is a great model of international talent development, bringing together the fresh minds of University students, industry professionals, academics and the latest technologies and we are delighted to be a part of that."

www.abertay.ac.uk

Students shine at University of Teesside's Vis Awards

Teesside University's Vis Awards has celebrated its student talent by awarding four of them six-month contracts at Ubisoft Reflections.

The awards seek to recognise the skill and knowledge of students within the University's School of Computing, and are held in cooperation with Codeworks GameHorizon and the Newcastle arm of Ubisoft's development empire.

Ole Kristian Homelien (*far right*), Justin Lim (*second from right*), Wei Xing Yong (*second from left*) and Peter Adamson (*far left*) – who won awards for games programming, games design, character animation and modelling respectively – will now receive six-month paid internships at Ubisoft Reflections upon their graduation.

"Winning the Vis awards was an incredible experience, and a great opportunity to get a foot in the games industry door, something that is all the more valuable due to the uncertain economic state," said Adamson.

"The fact that my first job in the games industry is with such a major worldwide developer makes this all the more special, and I can't wait to get started!"

Giselle Stewart, general manager at Ubisoft Reflections (*pictured above, centre*), added: "We were very pleased that the University of Teesside invited us to sponsor these awards; we were able to spot some new creative talent to further our success as a developer of successful driving games. We were particularly excited about the calibre of students who won the internships and we hope it will be the start of an exciting career within Ubisoft for them."

www.teesside.ac.uk

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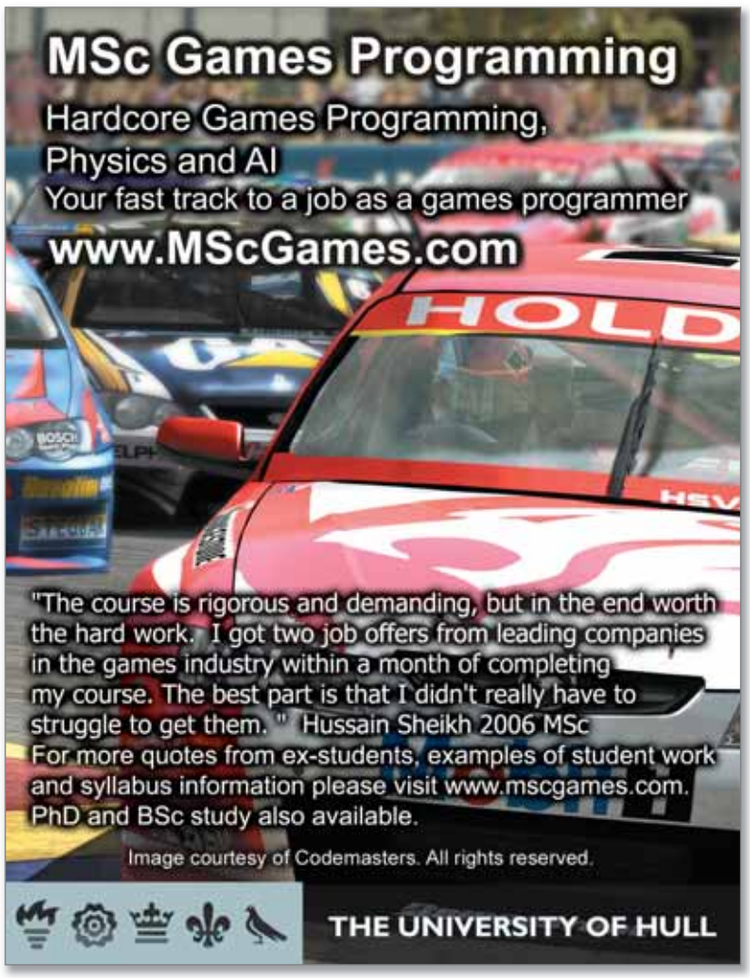
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MY FAVOURITE GAME

Notable developers tell us which game warmed their heart, caught their eye, and ate up their free time…

I LOVE… THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

by Yoshinori Kitase,
Senior Vice President of Software Development, Square Enix

> Back when the Famicom first came out, I was addicted to *The Legend of Zelda*. One of the things I think is really unique about it is that, right from the start, you can go straight to the final dungeon – there's a really vast level of freedom for players there, you can choose your own path. It was very unique for its time.

develop FORWARD PLANNER

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Develop Awards round-up
Event: Edinburgh Interactive Festival, GDC Europe
Regional Focus: Scotland
Copy Deadline: July 23rd

SEPTEMBER 2009

Outsourcing Special
Regional Focus: Asia
Copy Deadline: August 19th

OCTOBER 2009

The Future of Game Audio
Copy Deadline: September 17th

NOVEMBER 2009

100th Issue Special Edition
Event: Montreal Game Summit
Regional Focus: Canada
Copy Deadline: October 23rd

DEC 09 / JAN 10

Special Focus: Artificial Intelligence
Regional Focus: London
Copy Deadline: December 3rd

FEBRUARY 2010

Special Focus: Recruitment
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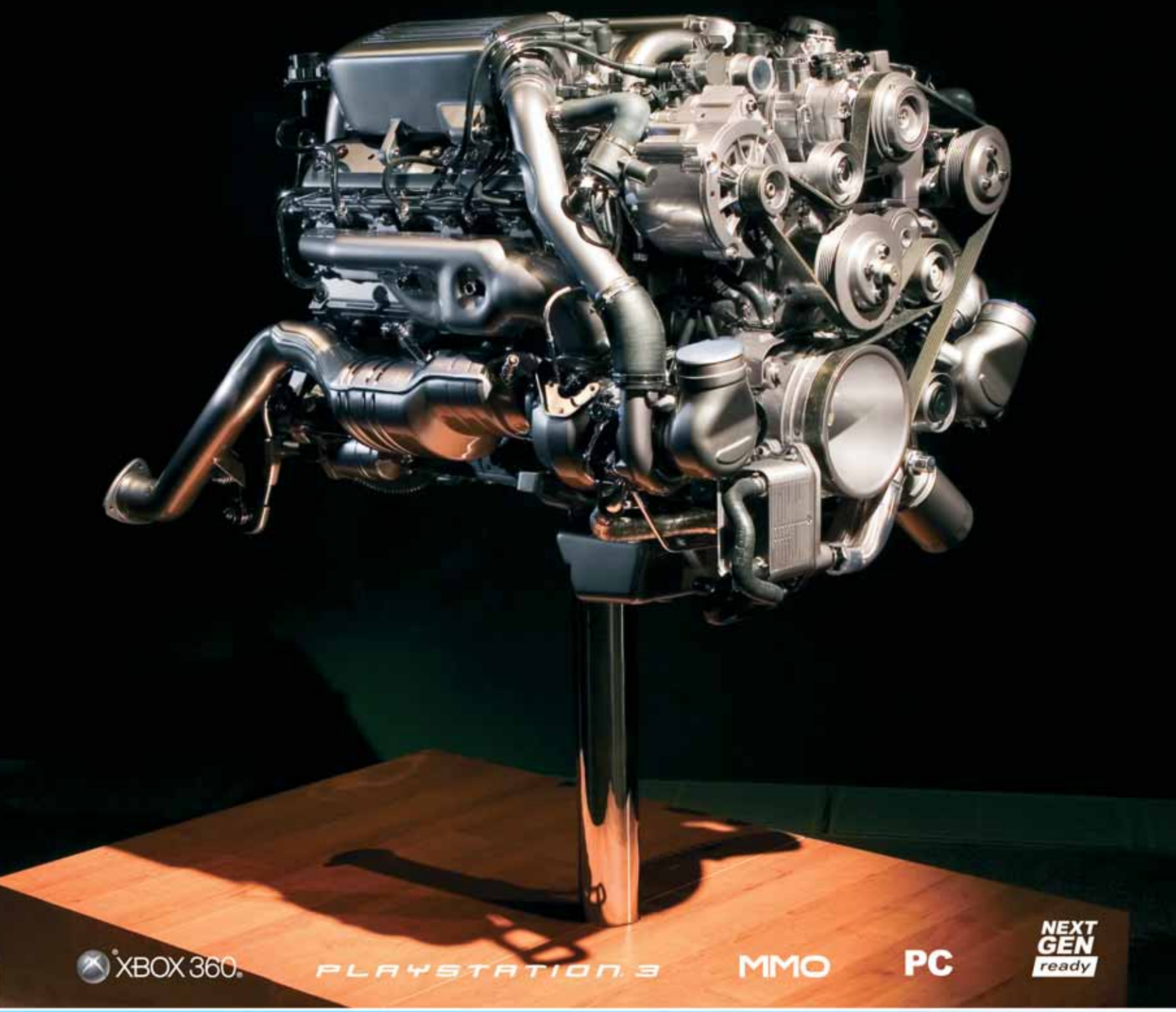

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